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ALL THE GODS ARE ONE



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THE NATURE OF HINDUISM

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Hinduism, the oldest of the world's living religions, has now about three hundred million followers, most of whom live in India. This religion has no founder. It is ethnic, not credal, with a history contemporaneous with the history of the races with which it is associated. Hence it is closely connected with the mythology, the folklore, and the customs and manners of Hindus, making it rather difficult to distinguish its essentials from its nonessentials.

Hinduism is not simply a system of ethics, although it includes in its teachings a code of ethics as comprehensive as any that has ever been devised by man. It is not simply a system of theology, though it includes within its scope more than one theology as consolatory as the heart of man could desire. It is essentially a school of metaphysics, for its aim is not merely to make man a perfect human being on earth or a happy denizen of heaven singing for all time the glories of god, but to make him one with the ultimate Reality, the eternal, universal Spirit in which there are no distinctions--no cause and effect, no time and space, no good and evil, no pairs of opposites, and no categories of thought. This goal cannot be reached by merely improving human conduct or reforming human character; it can only be attained by transforming human consciousness. Accordingly the Hindu sages, by the ethical and religious disciplines they prescribe, contemplate nothing less than that release (moksha) which comes to man through the opening up of a new realm of consciousness.

The Hindu scriptures, therefore, teach that the ultimate end of human life is liberation (moksha) from that finite human consciousness of ours which makes us see all things as separate from one another and not as part of a whole. When a higher consciousness dawns upon us, we see the individual parts of the universe as deriving their true significance from the central unity of spirit. It is the beginning of this experience

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which the Hindu scriptures call the second birth, or the opening of the third eye or the eye of wisdom. The consummation of this experience is the more or less permanent establishment of the transcendent consciousness which is the ultimate goal of man.

Our political and social institutions, our arts and sciences, our creeds and rituals are not ends in themselves, but only means to this goal of liberation. When this goal is reached, man is lifted above his mortal plane and becomes one with that ocean of pure Being, Consciousness, and Bliss, called Brahman in Hindu scriptures. Men who have attained liberation have only contempt for the pleasures of the world; they have no attachments and are untouched by sorrow. They see the whole world of things and beings centered in one indivisible spirit, and the bliss they enjoy is inexpressible in human speech.

Since, however, this transformation of human consciousness into divine consciousness (which is the high destiny to which men are called) is not possible in the course of a single life, Hinduism believes in a series of lives for each individual and the continuity of the self in all of them, either here on earth or elsewhere. Otherwise there would be no meaning in millions of human beings dying even before they are in sight of the goal, and there could be no explanation for the glaring fact that some men are, even from birth, far better equipped than others for reaching the goal.

Recognizing thus that the present life is only one in a series of lives, and that men are in different stages of their journey, Hinduism prescribes the kind of discipline which will suit their condition and will enable them to pass on to the next stage. If the metaphysical ideal is too advanced and abstract for a man, a theological ideal is set before him. At this stage the impersonal Absolute Brahman becomes a personal God, the perfect becomes the good, manifestation becomes creation, liberation becomes life in heaven, and love takes the place of knowledge. If he is not fit even for this stage, a course of ritualistic and moral action is prescribed for him. At this level the personal God is represented by an image in a temple, ritual and prayer take the place of meditation, and righteous conduct takes the place of love.

These three stages are only illustrative, not exhaustive. There are, in fact, as many stages as there are levels of culture in a vast community, and there are as many kinds of discipline. Hinduism provides for all classes of men from the highest to the lowest. In its hospitable mansions there is room for all sorts and conditions of men, from the mystic, who is very near the goal, to the illiterate peasant, who has not yet set his foot on the path. It does not thrust all men into the pigeonhole of a single unalterable creed.

This religious hospitality is shown by two characteristic Hindu doctrines called the doctrine of spiritual competence (adhikara) and the doctrine of the chosen deity (ishta-devata). The doctrine of spiritual competence requires that the religious discipline prescribed for a man should correspond to this spiritual competence. It is worse than useless to teach abstract metaphysics to a man whose heart hungers for concrete gods. A laborer requires a different type of religion from a scholar--so instruction should be carefully graded.

The doctrine of the chosen deity means that, out of the numerous forms of the Supreme Being conceived by the heart of man in the past and recorded in the scriptures, the worshipper should be taught to choose that which satisfies his spiritual longing and to make it the object of his love and adoration. It may be any one of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, or it may be even a tribal deity, rendered concrete to the eye of the flesh by means of an image.

Naturally there is, as a result of the wide catholicity indicated by these two doctrines, a great complexity of worship and belief within the Hindu fold. The greatest difficulty about the study of Hinduism, therefore, is that one is apt to miss the wood for the trees. One often fails to see the underlying unity amid the bewildering variety of castes and sub-castes with their own customs and manners, and of sects and sub-sects with their own cults and symbols and forms of worship, and amid the many schools of philosophy and systems of theology, with their different texts and scriptures and their commentaries, and commentaries on commentaries, and glosses on commentaries, and glosses on glosses--all within the fold of Hinduism.

There are, for instance, three main sects in the Hindu fold: the Vaishnavas, the Saivas, and the Saktas. The Vaishnava sect has about twenty subsects, the Saiva about ten, and the Sakta about five. In addition to these there are at least fifteen miscellaneous sects. The same is true of castes. According to traditions, there are four main castes: the Brahmans, the scholarly or priestly caste; the Kshatriyas, the warrior and ruling caste; the Vaisyas, the commercial and agricultural caste; and the Sudras, the laboring caste. But there are innumerable subcastes. Among the Brahmans there are traditionally ten classes, five northern and five southern, but every province has its own divisions and subdivisions. The subdivisions among the other castes cannot be counted. As might be expected where there is such diversity, the rituals, form of worship, customs, and manners vary among all these divisions and subdivisions of the people.

Unity Within Diversity

At the same time there is an underlying unity in the religious life of India. The soul of Hinduism has ever been the same even though it has had different embodiments in different ages and among different levels of the people. There are five elements which contribute to this unity of Hinduism: common scriptures, common deities, common ideals, common beliefs, and common practices.

Common Scriptures

The most important common scriptures are the Vedas, the Epics (the Ramayana and the Mahabharata), and the Bhagavata Purana; though the Bhagavata Purana may not be held sacred by some Saiva sects. The rest of the Hindu scriptures are more or less sectional or sectarian. The Vedas are called Sruti (that which is heard), while the rest of the sacred writings are known as Smriti (that which is remembered). Great sages and seers are said to have heard the eternal truths of religion and to have left a record of them for the benefit of others. The Vedas are therefore said to be eternal, their composers being only the channels through which the revelations of the Supreme have come. Accordingly, the Sruti forms the supreme authority for Hinduism. All the other scriptures, which form the Smriti, are secondary, deriving their authority from the Vedas, and accepted as authoritative only insofar as they follow the teaching of the primary scripture. These secondary scriptures, which are elaborations of the truths revealed in the Vedas, include the epics, the codes of laws, the sacred romances (Puranas), the manuals of philosophy (Darsanas), and the sectarian scriptures (Agamas).

There are four Vedas, the Rigveda, the Samaveda, the Yajurveda, and the Atharvaveda, each one consisting of four parts. The Mantras, which are the basic verses; the Brahmanas, one explanation of those verses of hymns and of the related rituals; the Aranyakas, meditations on their meanings; and the Upanishads, mystical utterances revealing profound spiritual truths. As the Upanishads come at the end of the Veda, the teaching based on them is called Vedanta, for anta in Sanskrit means the end. The Upanishads are thus the Himalayan springs from which have flowed the rivers of the Spirit which have watered the Indian Peninsula for the last twenty-five centuries.

The Upanishads were later systematized in the Vedanta Sutras. The sutra is a literary form peculiar to India; it is a mnemonic formula from which all unnecessary words have been removed, leaving a highly elliptical structure which requires the use of commentaries for understanding the full meaning of the writing. The Vedanta Sutras, based on the teachings

of the Upanishads, became authoritative for almost all schools of Hindu thought.

The teachings of the Upanishads were summarized in another and more attractive literary form in the Bhagavat Gita, which forms part of the Mahabharata. The Gita is a dialogue between Arjuna, the hero of the Epic, and Krishna, who is believed to be an avatara, or incarnation of God. There is a well-known Sanskrit verse which compares the Upanishads to cows, the Gita to milk, Krishna to a milkman, Arjuna to a calf, and the wise men to those who drink the milk. The Bhagavat Gita has come to be looked upon as the layman's Upanishad, for it presents the great teachings on the Upanishads in such a simple and beautiful form that the common people can understand them.

What the Vedas are for the learned, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata Purana are for the common man. They are accepted as sacred books by all Hindus. The Ramayana story of Rama's exile and his search for Sita, the Mahabharata story of the struggle of the sons of Pandu to regain their kingdom, and the wonderful stories of the childhood of Krishna told in the Bhagavata Purana are, as it were, part of the mother's milk which every Hindu child draws in his infancy. For most Hindus these epics and romantic narratives are far more historical than sober history, for they give them the higher truth of poetry. For countless generations the lives of the people of India have been molded by the ideals set for them in these epics. These two poems describe in concrete historical terms the eternal struggle between the forces of good and evil.

Thus it is that with the Vedas, accepted as the final authority by all Hindus, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavata Purana, revered as sacred books throughout the land, and the other sacred writings deriving their authority from the Vedas, the scriptures of Hinduism are a strong force making for unity within all the diversity of beliefs and practices.

Common Deities

The common deities are derived from the common scriptures. Though the Vedic hymns are addressed to many gods, the Vedic seers in their search after truth very soon discovered that there is one Supreme Spirit of which the various gods worshipped by men are only partial manifestations. There is a Vedic passage which is often quoted in support of this statement, "Reality is one: sages speak of it in different ways." This idea that every god whom men worship is the embodiment of a limited ideal, that he is the symbol of one aspect of the Absolute, has

persisted down the ages and is, in fact, one of the most fundamental characteristics of Hinduism. It is also this idea which is responsible for the continued existence of a host of gods in the imagination of the people, even when they believe in one Supreme Spirit.

The common people have generally hungered for some concrete embodiment of the Divine, while the learned, who knew better, were tolerant of--and even encouraged--all popular forms of worship. Thus, in the course of time, through many steps which have been lost to us, the three important functions of the Supreme, that is, creation, protection, and destruction, came to be established in the imagination of the people as the three great gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, known as the Hindu Triad or Trinity. The power that was associated with each of these great gods was also later personified and represented as his consort. The consort of Brahma the creator was called Saraswati (the goddess of speech and learning), that of Vishnu the protector was called Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth and prosperity), and that of Siva the destroyer was called Sakti (the goddess of power and destruction). Also, a Vishnu is the protector of creation. He is represented as coming down as an avatara, taking human form whenever the world order is disturbed by some colossal form of evil. Rama and Krishna are regarded as such avatars or incarnations of Vishnu and are objects of worship for all Hindus.

Popular imagination that revels in the concrete has not stopped there. It has provided the great gods with their own appropriate heavens, their own attendants, their own vehicles, and even their own progeny. The more intelligent among the people understand the meaning of all this symbolism, but to the masses the symbols are ends in themselves. The point to be noticed here, however, is that this symbolism is common to all Hindus and that the exclusive emphasis on a particular god or goddess in this scheme at a later time gave rise to sectarian theisms in the fold of Hinduism, such as the Vaishnavism of the worshippers of Vishnu, the Saivism of the worshippers of Siva, and the Saktism of the worshippers of Sakti or Power, a name exclusively given to the consort of Siva. A fourth sect, called Smartas, is made up of worshippers who do not belong to these three sects nor follow their sectarian scriptures (Agamas), but who go by the ancient traditions (Smritis) and worship all the gods without any exclusive preference.

The sectarian worshippers in Hinduism are like the exclusive political parties, each with its own policies, shibboleths, and programs. And, just as a large and overwhelming majority of the people in a country do not belong to any party, but vote conservative or liberal according to the needs of the hour, so an overwhelming majority of Hindus are nonsectarian.

They are neither exclusively Vaishnavas, nor Saivas, nor Saktas. This is possible because the people are taught that the particular name and form of any deity are limitations which we in our weakness impose on the all pervading Spirit, which is really nameless and formless. Also, even the common people are taught that the worship of a personal god is only a halfway house in man's journey to the Ultimate Reality.

We represent the Supreme Spirit as a person because personality is the most intelligible and attractive concept of which our minds are capable. The Supreme Being is a person only in relation to ourselves and our needs. In Himself he is something above personality. When the sun blazing in the sky cannot be looked at by us we use a smoked glass and then see it as a round, red disk. Similarly, when the Supreme Being in His glory cannot be perceived as He is, we perceive Him through our human spectacles and apprehend only some aspects of Him and think of Him as a person. Thus even the highest theism is only a sort of glorified anthropomorphism, but we cannot do without it.

The heart of man hungers for a god of love, grace, and mercy. These sublime qualities may exist in the Supreme Spirit in some transcendent forms unknown to us but we can lay hold of them only in their human forms and raise them to their highest potential, and by assimilating them rise to the transcendence of the Spirit. Accordingly, Hinduism at its highest neither rejects theism nor accepts it as the last word in religious philosophy. "Reality is one: sages speak of it in different ways," and Hinduism achieves unity in diversity by cherishing the many ways in which men have represented and worshipped the various aspects of the Supreme Spirit.

Common Ideals

All the sects and offshoots of Hinduism have the same moral ideals. The cardinal virtues of Hinduism are purity, self-control, detachment, truth, and nonviolence; it is these ideals which have given the people of India a common idea of a good life.

Purity means both ceremonial purity and moral purity; the former is considered to be preliminary to the latter. All purificatory baths and ceremonials and all the elaborate rules regarding food and drink prescribed in the Hindu scripture are meant to lead to purity of mind and spirit.

Similarly self-control implies both the control of the flesh and control of the mind. When this virtue is pushed to an extreme it becomes asceticism, and it must be admitted that

India generally loves an ascetic. All her great moral and religious teachers from Buddha to Sri Ramakrishna have been ascetics. But Hinduism, at its best, does not glorify asceticism. It does not call upon its followers to suppress the flesh altogether. On the contrary, it teaches that the body is an instrument of righteousness and seeks to regulate its appetites and cravings, teaching the flesh its place. Hinduism takes into account all the factors of human personality, the body, mind, soul and spirit, and prescribes a graded discipline for all. It advocates a complete and integrated life in which the claims of all parts of man's nature are reconciled and harmonized.

The higher phase of self-control is detachment. We have not only to overcome what is evil in life but also to become independent of what is good. For instance, our domestic affections, our family ties, our love of home and friends are all good in themselves. But as long as we are passionately attached to these earthly things we are only on the lower rungs of the spiritual ladder. Love, affection, and friendship are indeed divine qualities, and the more we cherish them the nearer we are to the Supreme Spirit. But the way to cherish them is not to be blindly attached to the particular objects of these feelings. Complete liberation from this world and union with the Divine are not possible so long as one clings either to the evil or to the good in this existence.

The positive side of detachment from the changing world is attachment to the Reality which endures forever. Truth as a cardinal virtue in Hinduism means far more than mere truthfulness; it means the eternal reality. Mahatma Gandhi described Hinduism as a quest for truth through non-violence. The Hindu scriptures say that the pursuit of truth, wherever it may lead and whatever sacrifices it may involve, is indispensable to the progress of man. Hence Hinduism has never opposed scientific progress nor speculations in metaphysics or ethics.

Truth is always associated with nonviolence (ahimsa) in the Hindu scriptures. The two together are considered to be the highest virtues. The greatest exponent of nonviolence in modern times was, of course, Mahatma Gandhi, who taught that nonviolence must be practiced not only by individuals but also by communities and nations--in all spheres of life. The influence of this ideal is seen in all aspects of Hindu life: their mildness, their hospitality, their horror of bloodshed, their gentleness, their toleration, and their kindness to animals--especially the cow--are all due to the ideal of nonviolence which they have cherished through the ages. The pacific character of Hindu civilization is due to this great moral ideal.

Common Beliefs

Underlying all schools of religious thought in Hinduism there are some fundamental beliefs which every system-builder takes for granted, as they form part of the authoritative religious tradition. These may be described in modern terms as beliefs concerning: (a) the evolution of the world; (b) the organization of society; (c) the progress of the individual; (d) the fourfold end of human life; and (e) the law of karma and rebirth.

The evolution of the world, according to the teaching given in one of the Upanishads, came about through successive stages beginning with matter and going on through life, consciousness, and intelligence to spiritual bliss or perfection. At one end of the cosmic scale there is pure matter in which spirit lies dormant, and at the other end pure spirit in which matter lies dormant. Between these two extremes there are various orders of dual beings composed partly of matter and partly of spirit. Spirit becomes richer as it ascends the scale, and matter becomes poorer. The spirit appears as life in vegetables, as consciousness in animals, as intelligence in men, and as bliss in the Supreme Spirit. So there is a gradual ascent from matter to life, from life to consciousness, from consciousness to reason, and from reason to spiritual perfection.

A man is nearer to the Supreme Spirit than an animal is; an animal is nearer to Him than a plant, and a plant is nearer to Him than a lifeless stone. Similarly, a good man is nearer to the Supreme Spirit than a bad man, a saint is nearer than a sinner. The more of such spiritual qualities as goodness, justice, mercy, love, and kindness a man has, the nearer he is to the Supreme Being who is the source and perfection of all spiritual qualities. And the more he has of qualities such as cruelty, selfishness, greed, and lust, the nearer he is to the animal. Thus the universe is a vast amphitheater in which there is a colossal struggle going on between spirit and matter, giving rise to various orders of beings ranging from the lifeless stone to the omniscient Supreme Spirit.

The Upanishads thus reveal to us the law of spiritual progression underlying creation. But, of course, we see only the intermediate stages of this cosmic process. As the Bhagavat Gita says, "unmanifest is the origin of beings, manifest their midmost stage, and unmanifest again their end." We do not know how the Primal Spirit came to divide itself into subject and object and started the process of evolution, nor how the sundered spirit will finally be restored to its original wholeness in the Absolute. For the beginning and the end of

the cosmic process are beyond time, which is a narrow bridge between two eternities. All that we humans located in time and space can know is that there is a process of spiritual progression on a vast scale going on in the universe and that it should be our guiding principle in all our plans and schemes.

Any scheme or plan designed by us for enhancing the spiritual values in the world would therefore be in accordance with the cosmic purpose. And any scheme which reverses the order and places the lower biological or material values above the higher spiritual values goes contrary to the divine plan. Thus the law of spiritual progression is an unerring standard for us. It decrees that spiritual values such as truth, beauty, love, and righteousness are of the highest importance; next come intellectual values such as clarity, cogency, subtlety, and skill; then come such biological values as health, strength, and vitality; and last, at the lowest level, come such material values as riches, possessions, and pleasures.

It is very necessary for us to keep this formula of spiritual progression ever before our minds. It is the master key which opens every room in the mansion of Hindu civilization. Let us, for instance, take the Hindu view of history. Though the Hindus have not produced great historians, their sages had a correct view of historical progress and decline, a correct standard for judging civilizations. In their view the golden age in the history of man is the period in which all moral and spiritual values are well established and universally recognized and acted upon. They picturesquely described it as a time when the "cow of righteousness" (dharma) walked on all its four legs. And all the ages which fell away from the standard of that golden age--ages in which the cow of righteousness limped on three legs or two legs, or stood precariously on one leg--were ages of inferior civilization, whatever their achievements might be in other directions.

Thus the Hindu sages judged the greatness of nations not by the empires they possessed, nor by the wealth they accumulated, nor by the scientific progress they achieved, but by the degree of righteousness and justice they cultivated. Their teaching is that man's true progress is to be judged by moral and spiritual standards, and not by material and scientific standards. This teaching has been in our own day underlined and emphasized by Mahatma Gandhi.

The second of the common beliefs of Hinduism, concerning the organization of society, grows from the first, the principle of spiritual progression. In accordance with that principle which they had observed in nature and the history of races and nations, the Hindu lawgivers tried to construct an ideal society in which men should be ranked, not according to their

numerical strength or wealth or power, but according to their spiritual progress and culture. In their view, numbers, wealth, and power should be subordinated to learning, virtue, and character.

A social system which embodies this ideal is called varna-dharma. Varna literally means color, and dharma, which is a difficult word to translate literally, here means duty which results from the particular abilities with which a man is born. In very early times Hindu society consisted of two races, the fair-skinned Aryans and the dark-skinned pre-Aryans. The contrast of color between the two gave rise to the concept of varna, which later came to mean caste. As the Aryan conquerors became partially assimilated, society became stratified; the priestly and military classes were distinguished from the common people who, together with the conquered tribes, tilled the soil and carried on trade. Thus there came into existence even in the early prehistoric times the four castes; the Brahmans (the teaching class), the Kshatriyas (the military class), the Vaisyas (the mercantile and agricultural class), and the Sudras (the laboring class).

The earliest reference to the four castes is found in a late book of the Rigveda, where they are represented as forming parts of the body of the Creator. Obviously it is only a poetic image indicating the organic nature of the society of the time. In later ages the Hindu lawgivers, epic poets, and authors of popular religious works persistently maintained this theocratic ideal so that, in spite of all the transformations which the society was undergoing before their very eyes, people looked on the fourfold caste system as a divine institution to which they should conform if they would save their souls. Not only were the four castes conceived as the creation of God but also they were said to conform to the cosmic law of spiritual progression, the most spiritual class occupying the top and the least spiritual to the bottom.

Also, according to the science of the time, nature had three fundamental qualities of purity (sattva), energy (rajas), and inertia (tamas). It was supposed that those in whom purity predominated formed the first caste, those in whom energy predominated formed the second caste, and those in whom inertia predominated in varying degrees formed the third and fourth castes. According to this theory, each caste should perform its own duties, follow its own hereditary occupations, and all should cooperate with one another in working for the common welfare. The theory also provided that the good actions of a man in this life earned for him promotions to a higher caste in the next life.

The dream of the Hindu sages and lawgivers was evidently to organize the Hindu society into a cooperative hierarchy like the Hindu joint family, where the elder members had greater freedom and responsibility and the younger ones had greater shelter and protection. The system thus advocated had its own merits and defects. It arranged for division of labor, it cut short competitions, and gave full weight to the principle of heredity. But it gave no scope for individual genius, it made too much of the accident of birth, and it killed all initiative. In a word, it made for order and not for progress.

But we should not forget that all this was only a theory and an ideal. At no time in the history of India did the actual facts ever correspond to it. At no time of which we have any reliable history were there the four simple homogeneous castes postulated by the Varnadharma theory. The normal civic life of the people in their daily occupation often cut across all racial and class divisions and in the course of centuries produced innumerable hereditary occupational castes.

Again, in religious schisms and the formation of religious sects is found another force cutting across class divisions and eventually producing new groups, which, in their turn, through exclusive marriage laws, developed into subsects. There were also numerous other influences, such as excommunications, mixed marriages, distant migrations, and colonizations which contributed their own share to the complexities of the caste system. It is upon this very complex and, we may say, recalcitrant material that the Hindu sages and nation-builders tried to impose through the ages their ideal scheme of varnadharma. Although they were never completely successful, the diagram of the four castes was so indelibly impressed on the national imagination that, during all those centuries when a strong central government was either nonexistent in the country or was frequently changing hands, it was the theocratic ideal of the caste system that saved the Hindu society from disruption.

What the Hindu governing class failed to do the teaching class did after its own fashion. The Hindu kings failed to build an enduring state capable of dissolving all class jealousies and antagonisms and warding off foreign invaders. The Hindu teachers established instead the ideal of varnadharma, which for a long time mitigated class antagonisms and harmonized communities occupying various levels of culture into a single society with common moral and spiritual ideals. They could not, of course, ward off foreign conquest, but they neutralized its effects. It is no exaggeration to say that it is the caste system with its ideal of varnadharma that has saved the Hindu civilization from the fate of many ancient civilizations which have passed away.

However, it must be admitted that in the very act of saving Hindu society the system became far too rigid and exclusive and lost all its old elasticity. In the name of the caste system the Hindus have developed too much of class hatred and too little spirit of cooperation. The caste system with its rigid walls of separation is bound to pass away, as it has become completely out of place in modern world conditions. But the underlying principle of varnadharma is valid for all time, for in the ideal society wealth, numbers, and power should be subordinate to character and culture; cooperation should take the place of competition; and there should be an organic relation between men's aptitudes and their occupations. In any ideal society built upon the Upanishad principle of spiritual progression the most responsible positions should be occupied by the men spiritually most advanced, irrespective of the caste into which they may have been born. This ideal continues to be a unifying belief in the religion of the Hindus.

The third unifying belief of the Hindus is that the individual life should be built upon the same concept of spiritual progression which should control community life. The Hindu sages divided the ideal life of an individual into four successive stages, called asramas; the student, the householder, the recluse who withdraws from the world, and finally the sannyasin (religious mendicant) who renounces the world. These stages indicate the path of progress for the ideally ordered life of an individual.

The first stage is devoted entirely to study and discipline. The student should have no other responsibilities and no distractions of any kind. He should not indulge in any pleasures but should subject himself to a rigorous discipline. He should look upon his teachers as his spiritual parents, and by his habits of attention, obedience, and reverence should please them and humbly receive what they have to impart. This is a stage of preparation and probation, and not of action.

After the period of preparation is over, the student should marry and settle down as a householder and faithfully discharge his duties to his community and country. By glorifying the householder's stage and by sanctioning his pursuit of wealth and pleasure within the bounds of the moral law, Hinduism does justice to the flesh as well as the spirit of man. It lays down no impossible rules of asceticism for normal human beings, but recommends a gradual and progressive conquest of spirit over flesh.

When this period of active life and citizenship is over, and after all the duties that fall to his lot are discharged, the householder should retire to a quiet place in the country and meditate on the higher things of the spirit. He is now free

from all social bonds and can take a detached view of all problems of human life. This is, as it were, the second period of probation. Just as the student's life is a preparation for the householder's life, the retired life of the recluse is a preparation for the renunciation of all earthly ties in the final stage of life.

After this second probation is over, the recluse becomes a sannyasin, one who has renounced all earthly possessions and ties. In this final stage one need not observe any distinctions of caste, or perform any rites and ceremonies, or attach oneself to any particular country, nation, or religion. Looking upon all beings as so many forms of the Universal Spirit, the sannyasin wanders from place to place, feels at home everywhere, and gives himself up entirely to the service of the Supreme Spirit. According to Hinduism, renunciation is the crown of human life, and therefore all Hindus bow before a sannyasin and think it is a privilege to serve him.

Here again, this scheme of the four stages of life is only an ideal. In practice, not even one in a thousand traverse the entire path and go regularly through all the stages. Though technically the scheme is supposed to hold good only for the first three castes, it is an ideal accepted by all Hindus. There are now sannyasins from all castes, and they are revered by all without distinction. This ideal of the four stages of life, which is cherished by all Hindus, once again emphasizes the unity in diversity characteristic of Hinduism.

The fourth of the common beliefs of Hinduism is the belief in the fourfold end of human life. It is based on the principle of the progressive realization of the spirit, as was the case with the four castes and the four stages of life. The goal of life for a man is called dharma-artha-kama-moksha. In this formula dharma means righteousness, artha means worldly prosperity, kama means enjoyment, and moksha means liberation.

The ultimate aim of man is liberation--liberation not only from the bondage of the flesh but also from the limitations of a finite being. In other words, moksha means becoming a perfect spirit like the Supreme Spirit--but on his way to this final goal man has to satisfy the animal wants of his body and the economic and other demands of his family and community.

The wants of his body are indicated by the word kama, which stands for all the appetites of the flesh. The demands of the social environment are indicated by the word artha, which means wealth. That is, man has to acquire wealth so that he may maintain his family and help his dependents; but

all this should be done within the limits of the moral law indicated by the word dharma in this formula.

The Sanskrit word dharma is difficult to translate. It is translated into English as law, righteousness, duty, morality. Dharma is moksha in the making. If moksha is complete divinity, dharma is divinity under human conditions. Dharma is half divine and half human. It is divine because it is the call of the spirit, and it is human because it changes according to the conditions of time and place. As man progresses, the code of laws also progresses--but at every stage there is a divine element in it and so it has to be obeyed as a divine commandment until it is abrogated.

The Hindu formula regarding the fourfold end of life thus lays down that the pursuit of pleasure and the acquisition of wealth should always be subject to the moral law. This means that one should be temperate in one's habits and never run to excess in indulgence in animal pleasures. Similarly, in acquiring wealth and property one should not use any unfair means or accumulate big fortunes, disregarding the poverty of others. But, within the limits of moral law, a man may satisfy the legitimate demands of his body and the needs of his family and dependents. Thus this famous formula of dharma-artha-kama-moksha, which expresses one of the beliefs common to all Hindus, is a complete chart of life giving proper directions to all our needs--physical, social, moral, and spiritual.

The fifth of the common beliefs of Hinduism is the belief in the law of karma or the law of moral causation, which is a unique characteristic of the religious thought of India. The law of karma is a moral law corresponding to the physical law of causation. Just as the law of cause and effect works in the physical world, the law of karma works in the moral world. When we put our fingers into a fire, they are burned, and similarly, whenever a man steals, his moral nature is injured. The more often he steals, the more thievish he becomes. On the other hand, whenever a man helps his neighbor his moral nature is improved. The more often he helps the more beneficent he becomes.

The law of karma is only an extension beyond the present life of this invariable sequence that we see in this life--for the law of karma postulates that every individual has to pass through a series of lives, either on earth again or somewhere else, before he obtains moksha or liberation, and it further explains that what we are at present is the result of what we thought and did in the past life and that what we shall be in a future life will be the result of what we think and do now. We carry with us our own past. The mental and

moral tendencies that the soul acquires in a particular life as a result of its motives and actions work themselves out in suitable surroundings in the next. New sets of tendencies are acquired which again seek a suitable environment in which they work themselves out. This process goes on through several lives, the individual sliding upward or downward in the moral scale until his soul obtains liberation.

Hinduism teaches that all creatures, as long as they are creatures, are involved in this time process which is called samsara, the state of each creature in any particular life depending upon the good or evil it has done in the preceding lives. Thus our characters and destinies shape themselves from life to life, not according to the arbitrary decrees of an external and whimsical god, but according to an organic law which is wrought into our very nature. According to Hindu belief, God is not a judge sitting in a remote heaven meting out punishments, but an indwelling Spirit whose will works in us through the moral law here and now.

Common Practices

Four of the common elements in Hinduism have so far been discussed--the common scriptures, deities, ideals, and beliefs --of which there were five main ones. Common practices make up the fifth element contributing to the unity of Hinduism. Under these we may include not only certain rituals common to large sections of Hindu society but also certain forms of mental discipline common to all Hindu sects. Hinduism is a highly practical as well as a highly philosophical religion. Therefore, side by side with its great philosophical systems it has elaborate schemes of religious ritual for bringing the worshipper into intimate contact with the deity he worships.

Every religious Hindu is advised to have his own chosen deity or ishta-devata, on whose form, features, and qualities he should concentrate his mind and whose image he should worship every day with flowers and incense. At the same time he is taught to recognize that the deity is only a means to realization of the Supreme Spirit. Herein lies the strength of Hinduism--strength which consists not in mere unity, but in unity in diversity. It is a grand federal structure that exists here.

The Hindu view of ritualism is that all men need the help of rituals, but in varying degrees and kinds, until the end which the ritual is designed to secure is gained. When the end is gained there is no longer any need for ritual. A sann-yasin accordingly performs no rites or ceremonies. Since the ritual employed at every stage should be suitable to the

disposition and level of culture of the worshipper, the uneducated people require grosser forms of ritual than the educated.

According to Hinduism, the ultimate purpose of ritualistic worship is the realization of the Supreme. It is to be achieved by the gradual transformation of the worshipper into the form of the deity who is worshipped. The first step in this direction is taken when the mind is made to dwell on some concrete form of the deity--an image, or an emblem, or a diagram--and thus to overcome its inherent tendency to distraction. The worship that accompanies this may be external or internal. In the external worship the deity is treated as a king or an honored guest. He or she is formally invoked, then served with various ritual acts, such as the offering of flowers or the burning of incense, and finally bidden farewell.

Internal worship consists of prayer and meditation. The meditation is often strengthened by japa, mudra, and nyasa. Japa is the repetition of a group of mystic syllables technically called a mantra. A mantra is not a mere formula or a magic spell or a prayer; it is an embodiment in sound of a particular deity. It is the deity itself. And so, when a mantra is repeated a hundred times, or thousand times, or even more, and the worshipper makes an effort to identify himself with the worshipped, the power of the deity comes to his help. Human power is thus supplemented by the divine power. A prayer is different from the repetition of a mantra for it is a purely human effort. One may pray in any language and in any form, but a mantra, being an embodiment of a deity in sound, has to be repeated in that form alone in which it first revealed itself to the mind of a Seer, a Rishi. It is not to be learned from books, but from the living voice of a teacher, a guru, who gives the initiation, and it has for its object the gradual transformation of the personality of the worshipper into that of the worshipped. Therefore the more a worshipper advances in his japa or the repetition of the sacred mantra, the more does he partake of the nature of the deity he worships, and the less he is himself.

This process of deification through worship is strengthened by mudra and nyasa. Mudra is a gesture of the hands and fingers calculated to visualize and emphasize the intention of the mind, and nyasa consists in placing the hands of the worshipper on different parts of his body--the forehead, arms, and chest, for instance, in token of the identification of himself with the deity or the deities he worships. Continued thought and repetition of the mantra and the engagement of the body in cooperation with the mind are calculated to produce the desired change in the worshipper. This is the general procedure that is adopted in private worship.

In big public temples, however, the deity is treated as the King of Kings. There are seven or eight services held in the course of the day in the larger temples. The god as king is formally roused from sleep with music early in the morning and sent to bed with music at night. The intervening services represent such royal acts as holding a court, giving audience to the faithful, and going out in state. This mystery play of everyday life reaches its climax in the royal wedding, which is an annual function attended by thousands of worshippers.

Lastly, mention might also be made of the pilgrimages which all devout Hindus undertake to places made sacred by the birth of a holy person or by association with one of the deities they worship. Such pilgrimages, together with the ceremonial baths in sacred rivers or temple tanks, are considered symbolic of the individual self's pilgrimage to the Supreme Spirit and of its purification from all sins.

Unlike most of the rites and ceremonies, the processes of mental discipline indicated by the word yoga are common to all Hindu sects. The word yoga is used in several different senses in the Hindu scriptures. It is cognate with the English word yoke and literally means yoking together, or union. It is in this sense that the word is most often used in the Bhagavat Gita, which indicates three paths leading to the goal of union with God: karma yoga or union through disinterested service, bhakti yoga or union through self-forgetting love and devotion, and jana yoga or union through transcendent divine knowledge. A man may choose, like Mahatma Gandhi, to lead an active life in the world and make every one of his actions an offering unto God, or he may devote his whole life, like Sri Ramakrishna, to the loving worship of God, or he may like Sankara, seek to realize God through philosophical inquiry. Which of these three well-known paths a man chooses will depend on his own temperament and the accumulated experience of his past lives.

In addition to these three, there is another path which is indicated in the Gita and which was developed later by Patanjali (ca. second century B.C.) in great detail. Patanjali, the author of the Yoga Sutras, defines yoga as the method of restraining the functions of the mind. He was the first to systematize the practices of this technical yoga, but the practices themselves had been in vogue in India from time immemorial. They are mentioned in the Upanishads and all later Hindu scriptures accept them as legitimate means of concentrating one's mind on the Supreme Being. Thus there is a practical unanimity on the part of all Indian teachers of religion on the question of the utility of yoga practices. Patanjali's yoga, which is called raja yoga, is described as

consisting of eight stages of discipline culminating in rapt contemplation of the Reality, a state called samadhi.

It should, however, be admitted that these elements of unity, the common scriptures, deities, ideals, beliefs, and practices are often obscured by many a wild growth of sectarian belief and ritual and many a survival of primitive custom and superstition. The proverbial Hindu toleration has had its own disadvantages as well as advantages. There has never been a single central authority in Hinduism charged with the duty of maintaining purity of doctrine and ritual; if there has been no heresy-hunting in Hinduism, there has been no restraining influence either. The Brahmans have been the custodians of religion, but they never have had, as a class, any political or ecclesiastical power. Moreover, for some centuries India has been under alien rulers and Hinduism has had to fight with its back to the wall for mere survival. Within the past century, however, there have been stirrings of new life full of hope, a renaissance of Hinduism.

The Bhagavata

The Bhagavata Purana begins with a verse which puts the whole Vedanta in a nutshell: let us meditate on the Supreme Truth, which by its inherent light dispels illusion for all time, that material and efficient cause from which alone the creation, existence, and dissolution of the universe result, because such causal character is present in that only and not in objects like primordial matter; (let us meditate on the Lord) who is omniscient and self-luminous, who through his heart extended to the prime poet (Brahma) the knowledge in the form of the Veda, about whose real nature the sages are in bewilderment, and in whom as the substratum there appears the essentially false threefold creation of elements, senses and deities, even as the transfiguration or glare or glass into water."

The Bhagavata begins where the Mahabharata ends, seeking to correct what it considers to be the fault of a story which tells of gambling, dishonoring women, and a devastating war which ends in a pyrrhic victory and neglects the emphasis on the glory of the Lord and devotion to him: "Renunciation without devotion to the Lord and action without dedication to Him are not good. However much your ultimate idea may be the inculcation of dharma, you ought not to have put to the people stories with loathsome themes and incidents. By nature addicted to the obvious pleasures of the senses, they revel in the doubtful material and miss the inner message." Thus the Sage Narada urged Vyasa, the author of the Mahabharata, to

concentrate on the pure glory of the Lord. Vyasa then sat in contemplation in his hermitage, saw the Prime Being in his pure devoted heart, and composed this Purana which allays the ills of man and constitutes the meaning of his attaining devotion to the Lord.

It tells the stories of many incarnations and partial manifestations of the Lord and of many sages and heroes who revealed in their lives the three paths of dedicated acts, knowledge and devotion. Of Dhurva (the prince who became the pole star), for instance, the story is told of how he learned from the Sage Narada the supreme secret mantra "OM, obeisance to the Lord Vasudeva," and after severe austerities attained the blessing of the Lord and was conched with the Lord's conch of knowledge. Whereupon he burst into a hymn of praise of the Lord: "He who, entering me, revive with his power my dormant speech, as indeed every other faculty of mine--to you that Lord the Being endowed with all powers, I make this obeisance. It is by the intelligence that you have extended that this moribund world awoke to life. How can one if grateful, forget your feet, the sole refuge for one's salvation?"

Of King Rantideva, who, himself dying of hunger, gave the little that he had to eat to the hungry beggar with the words: "I do not want the great state attended by divine powers or even deliverance; establishing myself in the heart of all beings, let me seek their suffering so that they may be rid of their misery."

The efficacy of reciting the Lord's name is told in the story of Ajamila, a fallen Brahman who, just as he was dying, said the name of his youngest son, "Narayana" which is the same as the name of the Lord Vishnu. When the emissaries of the god of Death came to take him, they were stopped by the attendants of the Lord Vishnu, who said, "Did you not hear him uttering the Lord's name, Narayana, though involuntarily?" This is the greatest expiation of sins, the utterance of the Lord's name whereby the Lord's memory is roused and sustained. Even if the Lord's name that is associated with another person, even though the utterance is in fun, a meaningless sound or in derision, whether it is with or without knowledge, it burns away all sins. A powerful medicine cures, even if it is taken accidentally; and a mantra too does, even if one does not understand its full efficacy. Thus Ajamila was saved, the words of Vishnu's attendants kindled his innate knowledge, and with poignant contrition of heart Ajamila repaired to the Ganges and attained to the Lord through yoga.

Manifesting himself as Sage Kapila, the Lord taught: "Ignoring me who am permanently enshrined in all beings, man

is making a mockery of idol worship. He who, in arrogance, hates me who am resident in another's body, sees difference, and is inimical, attains no peace; I, as enshrined within all, would be honored with charity, courtesy, and friendliness."

In addition to the many stories about the sages and heroes, the Bhagavata tells of the minor incarnations of Vishnu, and of such major ones as Boar, Manlion, Tortoise, Dwarf, Fish, Rama Parasurama, and Krishna, and Kalkin of the future. As Boar, at the time of the creation, when a demon was holding the earth under the waters, he plunged into the waters, lifted up the earth with his tusk, and killed the demon who stood in the way.

The demons are fallen gods; they seek the path of opposition to the Lord only for their quicker salvation; they hate the Lord and court death at his hands, eventually to be saved by him. A brother of the demon killed by Lord Vishnu in the Boar incarnation had obtained from Brahma the boon that he could not be killed by gods, men, or animals, and thus when it became necessary to kill him in order to protect his son Prahalada who was a devotee of God, Vishnu took the form of a Manlion neither man nor beast, and killed him. Prahalada then sang of the Lord the greatest of all the numberless humans in the Bhagavata; he said: "Sages practicing silent meditation in lonely forests care not for others; but leaving these brethren of mine, I do not want my lonely salvation."

As the war between the gods and demons continued, the gods came to Lord Vishnu for help. The Lord advised them, "Let the gods call off the fight and come to terms with the demons, for things are achieved not by agitation so much as by persuasion. Let the milk-ocean be churned, and the nectar secured from it will make you gods immortal. The first emanation will be poison, then a number of precious things will arise. You should be neither afraid of the poison nor covetous of the precious things; above all, there should be no anger. Mount Mandara will be the churning rod, Serpent Vasuki the rope, and myself your help." When they began to churn the milk-ocean with the mountain, it sank, and Lord Vishnu assumed the form of a huge Wonder-tortoise and supported it on his back. When the ocean was thus churned, there arose the terrible poison before which the people and gods fled in fright, taking refuge in the ever auspicious Lord Siva. Siva then brought the whole poison to His palm and swallowed it in His overflowing compassion; the poison could not harm Him but left a blue stain at His throat. Thus the stain caused by benevolent service is indeed an ornament to the

good souls. When the nectar was obtained from the bhuring, it benefitted only the gods because the gods worshipped the Lord and the demons did not.

Of all the incarnations of the Lord Vishnu, the most complete and the most popular is that of Krishna. Earth was again overburdened with demons in the form of arrogant kings. Earth went to Brahma and wept. Brahma said, "In the house of Vasudeva, the Supreme Being Vasudeva (Vishnu) will be born; let the celestial damsels be born as cowherd asses; let the sages be born as cows; let the serpent Seha, who has an element of the Lord, be born as his elder brother. The Mystic Power of the Lord (Yogamaya) will also be born for furthering the Lord's plan."

When Kamasa, ruler of Mathura, learned that the eighth child of his sister Devaki would cause his death, he put Devaki and her husband Vasudeva in prison and as each son was born to them, Kamasa put them to death. The serpent Seha became the seventh child in Devaki's womb, and before birth the Lord directed his Mystic Illusion (Yogamaya) to transfer the child from Devaki's womb to Rohini, a wife of Vasudeva in the cowherd village across the Jumna River, and then he himself became the eighth child of Vasudeva and Devaki.

Then came the blessed moment when the whole universe took an auspicious appearance; mild fragrant breeze blew; the sky was bright, and the hearts of good men became tranquil and happy. At midnight, Lord Vishnu, indeed within the heart of everybody, appeared in the divine Devaki, like the full moon in the east. Vasudeva and Devaki first saw the lord in his divine form, and then as a common baby who told them that if they were afraid of Kamsa they might take him to the cowherd village and bring back instead his own yogamaya born there as a daughter of Nanda and Yasoda. Vasudeva considered it more prudent to do so and, as He decided, the guards and others around fell miraculously asleep, the heavily locked doors opened, darkness gave way, a fine shower fell, the serpent Sehsa bent over the child in protection, and the deep overflowing Jumna River parted her waters. Vasudeva quietly came with the divine child to where Nanda's wife was asleep with a female child by her side. There he exchanged the children and returned to the prison house, put the female child on Devaki's bed, and replaced the iron fetters on his feet. As soon as the guards announced the birth of the child, Kamsa ran to the prison, snatched the baby by the feet and flung her against a stone. The child, the divine Maya, jumped into the sky, showed herself as the Goddess with eight arms, equipped with all weapons and said scornfully, "Fool, what is the use of your trying to kill me? He who is to be your death has been born elsewhere. Victimize not poor Devaki and Vasudeva."

Kamsa then sent forth a demoness to go through the cities and villages devouring children. When she came to Nanda's village the Lord knew of her arrival and pretended to be asleep. She took the boy on her lap and began to suckle him with her milk of poison but the Lord sucked up not only her breasts, but he also sucked her very vital breaths, and her huge carcass fell in the village crashing many a tree. Thus did little Krishna account for many a demon emissary of Kamsa that came to kill him.

When the Lord Krishna was born as their child, the cowherds knew no restraint to their joy and splashed each other with milk, curd, and butter. The child was named Krishna (the Dark One) on the advice of the priest, who said, "Because the Lord took different colors in the successive ages, white, red, and yellow, now take the dark color. As Vasudeva's son, he is also Vasudeva, but really His names and forms are infinite; He shall bring you welfare and joy, and with His help you shall surmount all difficulties." And Rohini's son was called Balaram: Bala because of his exceeding strength and Rama because of his attractive qualities.

As boys, the two brothers indulged in play and pranks, releasing calves, milking the cows, and stealing curds and butter. Once while all the boys were playing together some went to Yasoda and reported that Krishna swallowed mud. The mother caught Krishna and inquired. "No, not I. Look there," said Krishna and opened his little mouth. And Lo! What did Yasoda see there! The entire Universe, static and moving, heaven and the quarters, and the luminary bodies, the earth with all her continents, mountains and seas! Yasoda realized that the son she was fondling was none other than Hari, whom the Vedas and Upanishads and the paths of knowledge, action, and devotion were adoring. But the Lord drew over the mother again the veil of parental affection.

Once she was churning and Krishna could not be attended to and given his meal and in his peevishness the boy broke the churn and ate the butter. Yasoda became angry and tried to catch Him whom even the minds of yogis, directed by penance, were unable to grasp. She seized rope and tried to tie the Lord, one for whom there was no inside or outside, this side or that, front or back. She tied Him with a rope to a rock, but the rope was two inches too short; she joined another piece of rope, but the rope was again short by two inches. When every length that she could make was short by two inches and the poor mother was perspiring, Krishna submitted himself to bondage.



Another time, Krishna went with his friends and the cows to the banks of the Jumna. The sun was hot, and afflicted with thirst they went to a pool of the river where the water was poisoned by the serpent Kaliya, and the cowherdesses and the cows swooned on drinking the water. Krishna, who had come to rid the world of all evildoers, climbed a tree nearby, then jumped into Kaliya's pool. Kaliya attacked Him with its lifted hood but the Lord jumped on the hood and danced. To witness His dance, the whole heavenly world gathered with its orchestra. Krishna grew in size until Kaliya could not bear the weight of the Lord's steps; each one of which brought blood out of its mouth. Finally the serpent prayed that it might be pardoned and Krishna left it, commanding that it leave the river immediately and betake itself to the sea.

Krishna went about in Vrindaban in yellow silk garments, with a peacock feather on his head, bearing garlands of blossoms, playing his divine flute. The magic fell on the ears of the cowherd lasses who became jealous of the flute that drank the sweet breath from the jewel-like lips of the lord; the very cows stood still drinking the music of the Lord's flute with upturned ears; the calves stood ignoring their mother's udder and the grass. Perhaps the birds that sat on the boughs in silence listening to these strains were the sages themselves! The Jumna eddied all the more and appeared to stretch her arms of waves to clasp the tender feet of the Lord.

Winter arrived, the time when the Lord is the object of special worship. The maidens of the cowherd village observed the vow of worshipping the Mother, sustaining themselves only on the sacred food that they offered to the Goddess. Bathing at dawn in the Jumna they made images of the Goddess with the river sand and worshipped Her, praying to Her, "O, Goddess, the Mystic Power of the Lord: Make Krishna our husband. Obeisance to You." Clasping each other with their arms, they sang of Krishna as they went down to the Jumna to bathe. They left their garments on the shore and sported in the waters. To teach them the lesson that those in vows, especially, ought not to bathe like that without their garments on, the Lord gathered and got up in a tree on the bank. As they had prayed that He should become their husband, He granted their wish. He said, "The love that is directed to me can hardly be the desire of sensual enjoyment, for it is burnt in the fire of devotion and knowledge. Burnt seeds sprout not. This vow of yours and adoration of the Mother will be fruitful. You shall sport with me these autumnal nights."

The Lord saw these autumnal nights fragrant with blown jasmine and took it into His head to sport, resorting to His Mystic Illusion (Yogamaya). Seeing the moon in its full orb,

the Lord played most sweetly on His flute. The spell of those notes fell on the ears of the cowherd lasses (gopis), and possessed as it were by Krishna, they came to where Krishna was. "Why have you come on this terrible night? Your kith and kin will search for you; go home and serve your lords like virtuous wives. It is not so much by physical proximity to Me as by hearing of Me or contemplating on Me or singing of Me that love is developed for Me," observed the Lord.

"Like souls desiring release have we sought you, abandoning everything. Speak not these cruel words, we are your devotees, accept us," replied the gopis. The Lord listened to their moving words. Though one always delighting in His own self, the Lord, the Great Master of Yoga, smiled and in His compassion delighted the gopis. With the garland of flowers, flute in hand, the Lord shone amidst them like the moon among the stars. Going down to the sands of the river, He sported with them.

Now pride took possession of the gopis who had won Krishna's love. The Lord noticed their elation at their own fortune and, for purging their minds of its evil and purifying them, the Lord disappeared at the very spot. When the Lord was no longer to be seen, the gopis joined together, and thinking of Him, speaking of Him, imitating His acts and becoming thus one with Him, they remained singing of Him and expecting Him to arrive. "Those who are your own, whose life-breaths are in you, are searching for you in every direction. You are immanent witness inside all beings. It is to protect the world that at Bharma's own reflections, the Lord who, as the Master, is within the gopis (as well as their husbands) has taken this body for sport.

Kamsa then resolved to overcome Krishna in a wrestling match, and sent Akura to invite him to the contest in the arena. Akura brought the two brothers to Kamsa, and on the way as he bathed in the Jumna River he was blessed with a vision of the heavenly form of the Lord, lying on the serpent couch. Akura praised the Lord. "By manifold paths and at the direction of the manifold teachers, people worship you, the same, the sole Lord, who is of the form of all gods, and even as all streams flow to the same ocean, so do all paths come to you in the end." At Mathura, Krishna and Balarama came to the arena, overcame the wrestlers, killed Kamsa, released their parents from prison, and restored the kingdom to its rightful ruler.

Thereafter Krishna spent much of his time overcoming demons and evildoers, helping righteous rulers, and carrying out his mission on earth. He participated in the great battle between the Kauravas and Pandavas recorded in the Mahabharata,

and ruled his own kingdom at Dwaraka. The Lord had rid the Earth of many demoniac kings such as Kamsa and Duryodhana. Power and affluence, as the Lord again and again pointed out, always corrupted men; it turned the head and led the successful to arrogance and the insulting of others. Therefore, the Lord said again and again that when He wanted to bless one, He stripped one bare.

After many years of such services, the time came for Krishna to leave this earth. Before leaving, he gave a spiritual discourse to his beloved cousin and companion, explaining the nature of a good man. "Compassionate, unharmed, and forbearing toward all, having Truth as his strength, free from all impurity, equal and helpful to all, with a mind not ruined by desires, subdued, mild, clean, unburdened by possessions, without craving, moderate in taking things in, quiet, firm, silent, and meditative; with a spirit surrendered to Me, careful, deep, and unperturbed, devoid of pride, honoring others, fit, friendly, merciful, endowed with imagination--such indeed is the nature of the good and pure of soul."

The nature of the true devotee of the Lord (bhaktas) was then described by Him. "Giving up everything, and every other duty, they who worship Me alone, with no other purpose in view, are My best devotees. Adoration of My devotees and My symbols, service, singing of My praise, recital of My story, listening to such recital, thinking of Me, the sense of being My servant while collecting the goods of life, surrender to Me, freedom from pride and vanity, refraining from advertising what he has done--such are the features of a devotee of Mine who may attain Me through devotion and the service of the good and pure."

Of the three paths, the Lord said: "The path of knowledge is for those who are fed up with life; those that still have desires should pursue the path of sublimation through works; and for those who are neither completely indifferent nor too much attached, the devotional path bears fruit."

Finally, the Radavas, the people over whom Krishna had ruled, who had become proud of their power, were led into a fratricidal war in which they destroyed each other. Balarama then sat on the seashore in Yoga and left his mortal frame. The Lord sat similarly on the ground underneath a tree. From a distance a hunter mistook one of the red lotus-like feet of the Lord for an animal and shot at it. Under the pretext of his arrow shot at His feet, the Lord departed from the earth. The celestial beings rained flowers and sang and the effulgence that was the Lord shot across the firmament like lightning.

-- The Bhagavata condensed into English prose by V. Rahavan, M.A., Ph.D., Head of the Department of Sanskrit, Madras University.

DOCUMENT



The Mahabharata

The Mahabharata was composed by the Sage Vyasa who set forth here the greatness of Lord Vasudeva, the truthfulness of the Pandavas, and the evil conduct of the sons of Dhritarashtra. It is a treatise on the principles of material welfare, righteous conduct, emotional gratification, and spiritual realization. What is here is found elsewhere; what is not here is not to be found anywhere.

By virtue of his penance and spiritual discipline, Vyasa arranged the eternal Vedas and then composed this holy epic, concentrating his mind and seeing the course of its development through the power of his virtue and knowledge. Poets cannot excel this epic poem; in fact, they will have to draw upon it for their own creative activity. It is verily the food of all writers. The Eternal Lord is sung of here; He is Truth and the Moral Order, the Supreme Brahman and the everlasting light. Truth and Immortality are the body of the Bharata epic. It is called Mahabharata because it is great (Mahat) and weighty (Bharavat).

Although Dhritarashtra was the older son of the king of the Kuru race, since he was blind his brother Pandu was made king. Pandu had five sons, called the Pandavas: Yudhishtira the embodiment of dharma or righteousness; Bhima of terrible prowess; Arjuna, as powerful as Siva and as pleasing as Vishnu, and the twins Nakula and Sahadeva, of incomparable beauty.

Dhritarashtra had a hundred sons, but all of them were born in one mass which was put in a clarified-butter machine--out of that mass began to appear one after the other the hundred sons during the course of a hundred days. The first of them, Duryodhana, brayed like an ass as he came forth, and everybody advised his abandonment as he portended the annihilation of the whole race, but his father was too fond of his son to permit it.

The sons of Pandu and Dhritarashtra grew up together, but in all the sports of their boyhood the Pandavas outshone their cousins, leading to jealousy which continued all their lives. The rivalry which had grown up between them increased when the blind Dhritarashtra, who had become king after the death of Pandu, decided that Yudhishtira should be the heir-apparent. With his truthfulness and sympathy Yudhishtira had endeared himself to the subjects. Their teacher Drona told Arjuna, "The only person above you, I must now reveal to you, is Krishna, the Lord who makes and unmakes the world. He is the past, present, and future of the world; He is born as your cousin and will become your intimate friend and with you as His aide He shall fulfill the mission of this incarnation of

His. Take your refuge in Him." Arjuna went forth, won battles and brought fame and booty. All this excited the jealousy of Duryodhana.

Duryodhana contrived to send the five brothers and their mother, Kunti, on a pilgrimage and to have the house in which they stopped set afire, but they escaped in time; they disguised themselves as recluses and went to King Drupada's capital to compete in a contest for the hand of his beautiful daughter, Draupadi. To win her, the contestant had to bend the bow and hit the target, but none of the suitors assembled there could do it. Duryodhana tried, but the impact of the bow flung him on his back. Then Arjuna came forward, made obeisance to Lord Shiva, thought of Krishna and took up the bow. In a moment, he strung it and shot the target; heavenly flowers fell on Arjuna. Draupadi walked forward, her face beaming even without a smile, her feet tremulous even without intoxication, her eyes eloquent without a word. The victorious brothers walked out of the arena with Draupadi.

Coming home, the Pandavas announced to their mother that they had secured some alms for the day, and as usual, the mother said that all five of them should share their gain, without knowing that the gain of the day was Draupadi. But Yudhishtira remembered that the sage Vyasa had told them when he met them on their way to the contest, that they would secure a wife to be married by all of them together. Just then Krishna arrived and saluted their mother and congratulated his cousins on their acquisition of Draupadi. Their marriage was then duly celebrated.

Duryodhana was even more jealous of the Pandavas when he saw their success in the contest and wished to do away with them, but Dhritarashtra's advisors counseled him to seek peace: "The Pandavas are as much kings as your sons are. The talk of vanquishing them is idle, for who can stand against the ambidextrous Arjuna, the terrible Bhima, or even those twins? In the eldest Pandava you always find fortitude, kindness, forbearance, truthfulness and valor, how can he be vanquished? And above all, there is Krishna: where Krishna is, there success is. Duryodhana is childish, unrighteous, and perverse; do not listen to his words." Dhritarashtra accepted their advice and called Yudhishtira and said, "My sons are evil-minded and haughty; let there be no more quarrel. You have half the kingdom and rule it."

With his brothers the truthful Yudhishtira ruled the kingdom in righteousness. Yudhishtira pursued without any disproportion the three ends of human endeavor; virtues, desires, and material acquisitions--and looked verily like the fourth

end of man, spiritual discipline controlling the other three. The people delighted in him, his very sight made their eyes and hearts bloom. What he would consider beneficial if done unto himself, that Yudhishtira did; and never untruthful, unbearable or unpleasant, the speech of the wise Yudhishtira was always attractive.

The success of his cousins made Duryodhana cry out in despair, "I am unable to stand this prosperity of my cousins; I burn within myself. What am I--neither a man nor a woman nor even any human being--I who put up with this rise of my rivals?" When he cried out thus to his uncle, Sakuni, the uncle advised that they should deprive them of their possessions by stratagem; he suggested that since Yudhishtira was fond of dice and was not good at gambling, he should be invited to a game of dice at which Duryodhana could win all his riches.

So Yudhishtira was invited to come to the court of Dhritarashtra and was goaded into playing the game of dice, being called by Fate and Time to this unfair contest. Yudhishtira offered as stake his ornaments, gems, gold, treasury, chariots and horses, servants, elephants, and lost them all. Then goaded by Sakuni, Yudhishtira said, "This paragon of beauty, endowed with all qualities, this Draupadi I offer as stake," and on the next throw of the dice he lost her too.

Duryodhana at once sent for Draupadi, had her dragged into the hall and there his brother tried to disrobe her. Draupadi thought at this moment of trial on Lord Krishna, affectionate to those who take refuge in Him. "Imperishable Lord armed with conch, discus, and mace, residing at Dwarka, Govinda of Lotus eyes! I have taken refuge in you. Protect me!" Praying thus, Draupadi covered her face and wept. And lo! by the face of the lord, as he went on pulling her garment, the garment multiplied endlessly and amidst shouts of wonder, acclamation of Draupadi, and condemnation of the base attempt to disrobe her, he gave up the attempt.

At that time ominous portents were seen, jackals yelled, and asses brayed; this suddenly aroused Dhritarashtra and he reviled Duryodhana for dragging the lady into the hall and addressing foul words to her. The king then offered Draupadi whatever boons she might want. She asked only for the liberty of her five husbands, saying, "I do not want more; avarice destroys righteousness. My husbands have been freed and they shall look to the future welfare." And the Pandavas returned to their capital.

After they had gone, Duryodhana reproached his father for interfering with their plans to put down the Pandavas; he got Dhritarashtra to permit them to invite Yudhishtira to another game of dice, the wager this time being only this: whoever lost should go into exile in the forests for twelve years, then spend one year incognito and if found out during that one year should go again into a twelve-year exile. The old king, wavering between righteousness and his weakness for his son, yielded.

Yudhishtira, because of his status, could not honorably refuse such an invitation and returned for this last game of dice where, again, he lost. Bark and deerskin replaced the garments of the Pandavas as they started their exile in the forests. Bhima, Arjuna, and the twins vowed to return and kill Duryodhana and all his followers in battle. As the five brothers left with Draupadi, the streets were crowded with people who wept and wanted to accompany them. Yudhishtira succeeded in persuading most of the people to return, but was unable to shake off the numerous Brahmans devoted to austere pursuits who accompanied him into the forests. He wondered how to maintain them since he had been deprived of everything, but he propitiated the Sun God and secured the miraculous vessel inexhaustible with which he could entertain any number of guests.

While they were in the forest, Arjuna did severe penance until Lord Siva blessed him and gave him his divine missile which could be used to deliver the brothers from ignominy, the other gods, too, gave them their missiles.

When Yudhishtira sat brooding over his suffering, sage Brahadasva consoled him by narrating the story of the sufferings of King Nala and Samayanti, and later the sage Markandeya narrated at length the story of Rama and Sita, and to console the brothers further concerning the sufferings of Draupadi, told them the story of the great Savitrai, whose lover brought her husband back to life.

At the end of their twelve years of exile they disguised themselves as servants and courtiers in the palace of the king of Virata, and there they passed successfully the year of incognito life.

The Pandavas sent word to Duryodhana asking for the return of their half of the kingdom, but he preferred war to a fair settlement. When it became clear that there would be a war, both Arjuna and Duryodhana sought Krishna's aid; he promised to help them both; to Duryodhana he gave his huge army, and he agreed to drive Arjuna's chariot in the war. Huge armies began assembling on both sides, made up of the thousands of elephants, chariots, and footmen of their allies, with close relatives on both sides of the battle.

In an effort to avert the war, Yudhishthira sent a message to Duryodhana. "We have forgiven and forgotten the dishonor done to Draupadi and the exile imposed on us. Let us now have our share of the kingdom, turn your mind away from others' possessions; let there be peace and mutual good will. Give us at least a portion, just five villages for the five brothers. Duryodhana, we are ready for peace as well as war!" The Krishna himself went to the Kaurava (kuru) court and begged for peace, warning them that what they did not give now they would part with in death on the battlefield. When Duryodhana scorned the plea, and even plotted to capture and bind Krishna, the Lord laughed, sparks flashed forth from him like lightning, and he assumed his cosmic form, blinding everyone but those whom the Lord blessed with divine wisdom.

When Krishna returned to the Pandavas and reported the failure of his peace mission, the armies moved to the great battlefield at Kurukshetra. The blind old king, Dhritarashtra, seated himself with Sanjaya by his side to tell him what happened.

With Queen Draupadi's brother as the formal general, Arjuna led the hosts of the Pandavas. Duryodhana chose his uncle Bhishma as the leader of the Kauravas. Bhishma, whose mother was the Goddess Ganga, had renounced his claim to the throne of the Kuru clan and had never married in order that he should have no sons to be rivals for the throne. He was renowned for his wisdom and virtue, and served as counselor to two generations of kings, and as teacher of both the Pandavas and Kauravas was loved and revered by all.

At the break of dawn, the blare of conches, the beating of drums, the neighing of horses, the roaring of elephants, and the tumult of warriors rose everywhere. The chariots drew up on both sides and the sight of the golden standard of Bhishma sent shivers through the Pandava hearts. "How are we to break through an army commanded by Bhishma?" asked Yudhishthira. Arjuna replied, "Victors win not so much by strength and heroism as by truth and goodness. Let us eschew unrighteousness and fight without egoism. Where there is right, there victory is; where Krishna is, there victory is."

Strangely the same Arjuna who spoke with such faith and courage to his elder brother was unnerved when he came to the center of the two armies and had a full look at all the elders and brothers, teachers, and kinsmen against whom he was expected to fight. It was when he laid down his bow and expressed his resolve not to fight that Krishna, his charioteer, gave him the instruction which is embodied in the great philosophical discourse of the Bhagavad Gita.

Encouraged by Krishna, Arjuna took up his arms and the fight began with the Kurus and Pandavas falling upon each other as if possessed. Son did not recognize father, nor father his son; nephew and uncle saw not each other, nor friend his friend. So did the battle rage.

Under the leadership of Bhishma the forces of the Pandavas were hard pressed and might have been overcome had it not been for Bhishma's vow that he would not kill any of the five brothers. After ten days of slaughter Bhishma wearied of the fighting and decided to give up his life. His body was so full of arrows from Arjuna's bow that when he lay down he was supported in the air on arrowshafts, and there he lay on his bed of arrows until after the battle. He said, "I shall hold my life till the auspicious summer solstice when the Sun turns north; then shall I reach back to my original state, for my father has given me the boon of giving up my life at my will." Contemplating on the highest, Bhishma lay in yoga; both sides gathered around him and once more he urged that the fighting cease, but he was not heeded.

Then leader after leader of the Kaurava side fell, and finally Duryodhana himself was destroyed by Bhima. Thus the bloody war drew to an end. Dhritarashtra who had lost all his sons, then left for the battlefield, along with their mother and other womenfolk of the palace, lamenting the loss of their menfolk with heart-rending wails. The last rites for the dead heroes were gone through, with the Pandavas joining in the offering of water libations.

The thought of his dead kinsmen depressed Yudhishthira so much that he repented having waged the war, wished his enemies had continued to follow their own ways, and that he and his brothers had gone on in the mendicant life. His brother and Draupadi, aided by Krishna, corrected this attitude, praised the dignity and scope of service in the life of a householder and king, and induced him to enter the city and be crowned King. The citizens welcomed him with a chorus of praise.

After the coronation, Yudhishthira went to Krishna to express their gratitude for his help, but Krishna sat immersed in thought and replied not. When Yudhishthira questioned him about his silence, Krishna said, "Lying on the bed of arrows, Bhishma thinks of me and my mind is gone to him, to that repository of all knowledge. When that great soul is no more, the world will be as if bereft of its moon. Approach him and ask him whatever is in your mind; the different branches of learning, the duties of men, the duties of kings, ask everything. After him, there will be a decline of knowledge."

Then the five Pandavas and Krishna and others went to Bhishma and requested him to set forth the duties of man in all stages of life. Bhishma saluted dharma and the Lord Krishna and began his discourses on every imaginable subject coming under the four ends of human endeavor: virtue, gain, desire, and salvation. With principles and illustrative stories, Bhishma dealt with policy and kingly duty, the duties of the four classes of men and the stations of life, duties in abnormal times and the duties to be observed by one intent on a spiritual salvation. He taught them hymns to Siva and Vishnu, the merits of fasting and bathing in holy waters and of repeating sacred mantras, and pointed out to them the evil of avarice, ignorance, and cruelty, and the good of self-control, penance, and truthfulness.

Finally the day of the summer solstice came. Bhishma uttered a hymn to the Lord, and his last words to all of them were, "Strive for truth; be good." He then gave up his body by yoga and himself went to heaven.

Under Yudhishtira's rule, timely rains fell, people suffered not from hunger or disease, either physical or mental, and were not addicted to evil pursuits. Men or women, every one was sweet-tongued, of straight mind and pure. All sounds and touch were exceedingly happy, tastes very sweet, forms beautiful and smells pleasing.

In the thirty-sixth year of his reign the evil portents made it clear to Yudhishtira that the time had come to leave the world. Having turned the kingdom over to his successors, he set out with his brothers and Draupadi to cross the Himalayas, ascend the Meru mountain, and reach heaven. They were all proceeding toward heaven by virtue of yoga when Draupadi slipped from that yoga and dropped by the way. "Why has this virtuous Draupadi fallen?" asked Bhima. Yudhishtira replied, "She was partial to Arjuna," and passed on. After a while the scholarly Sahadeva fell and to Bhima's question Yudhishtira replied that Sahadeva was proud of his intellect. Then Nakula fell, Yudhishtira said that Nakula thought that he had no equal in beauty. Arjuna then fell because of his high opinion of his own heroism; and Bhima, too, because of his inordinate eating and boasting about his physical strength. Yudhishtira quietly moved on, accompanied only by his dog.

Indra then appeared with his chariot and asked Yudhishtira to get in to be taken to the heavens. When Yudhishtira said that he did not want the heavens without his brothers, Indra promised that he would meet them there. Yudhishtira then asked permission to take his dog with him, but Indra protested that dogs had no place in heaven and that even their sight was pollution. Yudhishtira replied that even if it

cost his own life he would not give up a being devoted to him. The dog then revealed itself as the god Dharma who was testing him again, as he had in the past. Dharma declared that even in heaven there was none equal to Yudhishtira and that in his own body Yudhishtira would attain the imperishable worlds.

The gods then led Yudhishtira to heaven where he found Draupadi and his brothers, and there he was again the Lord Krishna who, at the end of his mission on earth, he entered into the eternal Lord Narayana of whom he was an incarnation.

--The Mahabharata condensed into English prose by V. Raghavan, M.A., Ph.D., Head of the Department of Sanskrit, Madras

The Ramayana

The Ramayana tells the story of Rama, the prince of Ayodhya, as it was composed by the sage Valmiki. Rama was noble, dear to the whole world and equal toward all; he observed his own duty, that righteousness which was fitting for his nature and the time and place, and thereby protected those near him and the whole world, and dharma itself.

Brahma, the creator, came to the sage Valmiki, and commanded him to compose the story of Rama, the embodiment of dharma, and gave to him the power to compose in poetry and to know all events, both public and private, concerning Rama. "Not a word shall be false in your poem; compose the holy and beautiful story of Rama in these same verses," said Brahma and prophesied, "The fame of your Ramayana will stand as long as hills stand and rivers flow on the surface of this earth."

The righteous sage then purified himself, sat facing eastward on the sacred grass, and in his yoga saw it all, as clearly as a fruit on his palm. The venerable sage composed the story of the family of Raghu, of Rama's great birth, his heroism, friendliness to all, and truthful conduct, together with all the wonderful subsidiary stories.

In the city of Ayodhya, there ruled the virtuous Dasaratha, almost a sage, and a keeper of his word. The citizens under him were gay but righteous learned, each contented with his possessions, and truthful. But the king had no son to continue his line, so he performed the great horse-sacrifice to gain sons. Just as the gods were to receive his oblations they came to Brahma and told him that because he had given boons to Ravana the demon they were being tormented by the demon and could not subdue him. Brahma replied, "Ravana asked

the boon that he should not be killed by any of the divine or semi-divine beings and he forgot the men; he has therefore to be killed by a man." So the gods and Brahma together asked Vishnu to be born in the world to kill Ravana. "Choose Dasaratha, the victorious, generous, and sage-like king of Ayodhya and to his three wives you will be born as four sons; and kill Ravana." Vishnu promised that he would go down to kill cruel Ravana and his men, and live in the world as the ruler of the earth. When Lord Vishnu had thus become the sons of Dasaratha, Brahma asked the gods to be born in the world of monkeys, with all their invincible valor, so that they might aid the Lord in his mission of his incarnation. Accordingly they became thousands upon thousands of powerful monkeys, with power to take any form they pleased, and spread themselves over the hills and forests.

The four sons of Dasaratha were Rama, Bharata, and the twins Lakshmana and Satrughna. All of them were rich in natural endowments, but among them Rama was supreme, a veritable god among beings; he had true valor and valor displayed in righteous cause; he became dear to the world like the pure moon. From childhood, Lakshmana was always dear to Rama looking verily like his external breath, for without him Rama would not sleep or take food; wherever Rama went Lakshmana was always at the back, bow in hand guarding him. Similarly, Satrughna was dear to Bharata.

When Rama was not yet sixteen years old, the great sage Viswamitra came asking his help against the two demons who were interfering with his austerities and sacrifices by raining blood and flesh, polluting the altar. "The austerity I am in is such that I shall not show anger and curse them," he said to Dasaratha. "You must give me this young son of yours, Rama, of true valor, protected by me, even as nectar by fire; he will be able to destroy the demons who disturb me; in fact, none but Rama can kill them. I know Rama as the great soul of unfailing prowess; permit ten days absence and grieve not."

Rama travelled with Vishwamitra, receiving from him instruction concerning the sages and the gods, hearing the story of his austerities, and the creation and the glory of Mother Ganga, the great river. On the way, he killed the powerful demons and when they came to the abode of Vishwamitra and the two demons attacked as the sage practiced his austerities, Rama quickly killed one of them and flung the other far away. Then Rama went on to visit King Janaka who had a wonderful divine bow of such strength that none among the gods or men had been able to lift or string it. The bow, Janaka said, was Siva's own. "While I was leveling the sacrificial ground with a plow, there arose from earth this daughter of mine, Sita;

she is to wed on a prize; suitors have to lift and string the bow before taking her; no king has so far succeeded in doing so; if this Rama can do it, I shall give her to this son of Dasaratha." A hundred and fifty servants dragged the bow in the box on eight wheels. Lightly did Rama take it at the center and string it; when he pulled it with an arrow, it broke with a terrific noise which shook the earth.

Then Sita became Rama's wife, her sister Urmila was wed to Lakshmana, and her two cousins were married to Bharata and Satrughna, in one great wedding ceremony. Together they returned to Ayodhya. With Sita, Rama enjoyed himself, his heart being wholly on her. Sita was dear to him because she had been found for him by his parents and elders, and the love increased all the more by reason of her qualities and beauty. Rama was always in Sita's heart; whatever was innermost in their hearts, that heart spoke to heart in clear accents. Verily, with her, Rama shone like Lord Vishnu with Goddess Lakshmi.

All the four sons were indeed dear to the king, but Rama delighted Dasaratha most. He was superior in qualities over all--is he not the eternal Lord, Vishnu, born among men at the instance of the gods for the killing of the demons? Incomparable in his qualities, Rama was always of a composed nature; he talked softly, talked first, and talked with a smile. With exceeding valor, he was yet unelated; he spoke nothing false, honored the elders, learning from them whenever leisure was available. Attached to the people, and drawing their attachment, kind, controlled in anger, and sympathetic toward the suffering, he had the high notion of the duty of the Kshatriya to which he was born. He considered pure fame as equal to the great heavenly fruit; he indulged in nothing which did not contribute to welfare, had no taste for idle gossip; though in meeting argument with argument he was as gifted as the god of speech himself. He knew the time and place, and in the world he was the only one who weighed and understood a man's worth and yet continued to be ever good. He never felt miserable, was straightforward, and had memory and imagination. In worldly conventions and behavior he was trained and proficient; quiet in bearing, he did not disclose his mind and kept his deliberations confidential; gathered help, was effective in anger or satisfactions, and knew the time to give or withhold. He never got wrong ideas, never spoke foul words, was never lazy or careless. He knew the faults of himself and others, he judged well between man and man, and was adept in putting down or bringing up people. He knew the means of earning and the proper method of expenditure. Not only in the higher branches of knowledge, but in the miscellaneous accomplishments, too, he was qualified, and could enjoy himself without being indolent. He knew the recreational arts, knew

also the proper place of everything. Free from intolerance, pride, or envy, he never insulted any being, but was not on that account soft enough to succumb to the force of circumstances. Rama shone with these qualities as the sun with its rays, and Earth herself desired him as her Lord.

Dasartha, in consultation with his ministers, desired to make Rama the heir-apparent. Unfortunately, egged on by her hunchback maid Manthata, Kaikeyi, Dasaratha's favorite wife, wanted her son, Bharata, crowned king, and on the coronation day she forced the King to fulfill two boons promised her long ago by the King: the coronation of Bharata and the exile of Rama for fourteen years. The King could not go back on his word. The loss of the kingdom did not reduce the excellent charm and grace of Rama's countenance. As he gave up the kingdom and desired to leave for the forests, no untoward change was seen in him; he was as one high above all the world. The inner joy which was always his characteristic the heroic Rama did not give up.

Lakshmana was very angry at this turn in their affairs and sought to persuade his brother to take the kingdom by force, but Rama pointed out, "I am not starting any new dharma; none ever comes to grief by acting up to his father's word. Father has made a promise and the word has to be kept. So, leave off this military mind; take to dharma, not to violence; follow my mind." Thus, finally, by Rama's words was Lakshmana pacified, but not until Rama had consented to allow Lakshmana to accompany him into the forest.

Then Rama went to Sita's apartments to tell her that he would not be crowned king that day but was banished to the forests and must leave her. Her great love took the form of indignation and she replied, "Why do you speak lightly such funny things? My beloved Lord, father, mother, brother, son, daughter-in-law, all enjoy their respective fortunes; the wife alone shares her husband's fortunes. Not father, sons, her own self, mother or friend, but the husband is the sole resort of a wife. If you have decided to go to the forests, I shall go in advance, clearing the path of thorns. High or low, whatever be the husband's state, his proximity is best for the wife. I shall gladly walk the difficult man-forsaken jungles, and thinking only of following my Lord I shall enjoy the forests as much as the mansion. Even heaven will not appeal to me, no never, if it is without you." When poor Sita broke down, streaming in tears, Rama then embraced her, comforted her and said, "Divine lady, even heaven will not be welcome to me at the cost of your grief; I can leave you only if I can leave off my fame. Come along, help me in my dharma, prepare for the forest."

Then, after a sad parting, Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana set forth from their home. Gloom descended on the city; an ominous turn of planets was seen; there was no cooking in the houses, no business in the city; elephants dropped their feed, cows did not suckle their calves; and even a mother who was delivered of her first male child that day was not pleased. But Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana went on, crossing the Ganges and the Jumna rivers.

A few days after Rama left for the forest, King Dasaratha died of grief. The counselors immediately sent for Bharata to come home and assume the crown; but instead of being glad to become the ruler he was filled with rage against his mother who had conspired on his behalf, and as soon as he had performed the last rites for his father he set out to persuade Rama to come back and be king. The meeting of the two was like that of the Sun and the Moon, of Venus and Jupiter in the heavens. With matted locks and mendicant robes, like himself, Bharata appeared to Rama, as he lay there in front of him, like the Sun himself fallen from the skies. Rama lifted him, embraced him, took him on his own lap and asked him about the welfare of his father and the kingdom. Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita wept on hearing the news of Dasaratha's death, then went down to the river, bathed, and offered water and oblation to the spirit of their father.

When Bharata pleaded with Rama to return and be crowned king, Rama replied that Bharata was not to be blamed, that parents had a right to do as they pleased with their children, and that what his father had commanded, that he would do. Furthermore, when Dasaratha had married Bharata's mother, he had promised that the kingdom would go to her son; hence, Rama insisted, Bharata must go back and rule if he wanted to save his father from hell. When Bharata begged further, Rama replied, "The sea would transgress its shores, but not I the promise that father gave." Finally, Bharata was persuaded to take Rama's sandals back to Ayodhya as a symbol of Rama's presence and to rule as regent for the fourteen years, living as a mendicant outside the city.

Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana hoped to live quietly in the forest, but soon the demons, resenting his protection of the sages, attacked him with a force of fourteen thousand demons. Rama brought upon himself intense anger for killing all the demons, emitted a frightful shout, and aimed at them the divine Gandharva missile, and the whole of that holocaust of fourteen thousand demons were destroyed by Rama in but forty-eight minutes. That victory won for him the gratitude of the sages and the ecstatic embrace of Sita, but it so enraged Ravana, the Chief of the demons, that he resolved to kill Rama. The demon Marica, who had seen Rama, warned Ravana that he could

never "vanquish Rama in open battle; all the gods and demons put together cannot do away with Rama. He can bring down the heavens, uplift the earth, flood the world, destroy creation, and bring it into being again." He suggested that rather than fighting Rama, he should by stealth carry off Sita, and then Rama would give up his life because of his great love for her.

With the aid of Marica in the guise of a golden deer, the demon Ravana enticed both Rama and Lakshmana away from their hermitage for a moment, and in their absence seized Sita and took her away in his magic chariot. Ravana sped across the sky carrying Sita, who was crying and calling out to Rama and Lakshmana. As she was being taken along the sky by Ravana, she saw on the top of a mountain below five monkey-chiefs and to them she threw some ornaments, hoping that they would inform Rama. Ravana flew on across the ocean to Lanka (Ceylon) where he put Sita in his private garden under guard. He made every effort to get her to yield to him, but she scorned even to talk directly to him. He finally left her saying that he would give her twelve months to come around and threatened that if she did not agree, cooks would prepare her for his breakfast.

Rama and Lakshmana were overcome with grief when they returned to their hermitage and found that Sita had been stolen by a demon. They immediately set out in search of her, and guided by the animals of the forest that cast their eyes southward, they moved southward. Finally they were advised by Kabandha, a divine being in a temporary accursed state, "Rama, you must take a friend now, for I see no way to your success except through a friend; Sugriva, that chief of monkeys, is endowed with valor, a keeper of his word, modest, firm, intelligent, capable; he is your help in the search for Sita; do not sorrow any more, go now and make haste."

The two brothers accepted Kabandha's advice and sought Sugriva, the monkey chief who was living in exile, driven from his kingdom by his brother Vali. Through Rama's aid, Sugriva regained his kingdom, and in return promised to aid in the recovery of Sita; but the rains set in and there was a delay of four months, before they could set out to find her.

Sugriva then called Hanuman, his vigilant minister, and had him assemble the myriads of monkeys in his armies. They came, in such numbers that they screened the light of the sky itself, running, jumping, and roaring, some of them as big as elephants. They were dispatched in all four directions to search for Sita, and Hanuman was selected to go on the expedition to the south, for Sugriva had full confidence that he would succeed in any mission entrusted to him. "There is no

being equal to you; therefore you yourself see that Sita is discovered. Only in you are strength, intelligence, sense of time and place, and the politic way of doing things." Rama gave Hanuman his signet ring as a token of recognition to be shown to Sita when he met her.

After many delays and discouragements, the band of monkeys who had gone to the south met an old eagle who told them that Sita had been taken by Ravana to his palace on the island of Lanka. They hurried to the seashore, but when they saw the great distance to be jumped to reach the island they were once more in despair, for none of them could fly that far and return. All this time Hanuman sat silently, and finally the oldest in the party, the bear Jambavan, burst forth, "Hanuman, hero of the monkey world, great expert on all lores! Wherefore are you thus sitting silent and alone in the corner? Strength, intelligence, power, force, everything you have, and you do not know that. Let me tell you; you were begotten by the Wind-god himself; and when you were born, the Wind-god gave the boon that the son would be his own equal in flying. You alone can save us now. Therefore, go forth, O Hanuman, the whole monkey army is desirous of seeing your exploits. Rise up and take your strides, even as Vishnu of yore, who measured three worlds."

As these words fell on Hanuman's ears, power swelled forth in his person; his body attained magnitude. Hanuman himself gained now full consciousness of his innate power, and cried, "I can now go round the ends of the earth, all the seas and the entire sky; I can dry up the ocean, tear up the earth and pound the mountains. I shall blow away clouds as I go. I shall find Sita and bring her back." When Hanuman roared like this, his friends felt exhilarated and said, "With the grace of our elders, fly forth; our lives are in your hands; we shall be standing on one foot till you come back." Wondering if earth or mountain could stand his impact, Hanuman ascended the mountain from which he was to take his flight.

The flight of two hundred and fifty miles to Lanka did not make Hanuman even draw a deep breath. He marveled at the size and beauty of the city and for a moment despaired of success when he saw its fortifications and armaments and thought of the terrible Ravana. Then he contracted himself to a cat's size and slipped into the city after dark. First, he searched the harem, but he could not see anywhere among them that highborn lady who had been snatched away from Rama and was firmly following the eternal path of virtue. He continued his search without success and became depressed; suddenly he saw a park which he had not searched. "Ah," he said,

"I shall go there after saluting the gods." As he rose up with renewed enthusiasm, Hanuman uttered a prayer, "Obeisance to Rama, to Rama with Lakshmana! Obeisance to that divine daughter of Janaka! Obeisance to all the gods."

There in the park Hanuman saw a lady, clad in a soiled garment, surrounded by demoness guards, emaciated by fast, heaving, hard to be seen like the first digit of the waxing moon, like a flame enveloped in smoke, with suffering and penance, with tears and sighs, immersed in sorrow and thought, missing her beloved one and seeing all around only demonesses, like a fawn encircled by hounds. She was undoubtedly Sita, though it took some time to recognize her in that state of suffering. "Ah, this Sita!" thought Hanuman. "She does not see the demonesses nor the flowers and fruits of the trees; with her heart on only one, she is continuously seeing therein her Rama; for the husband, indeed, is a woman's ornament of ornaments." There under the tree, in the midst of the demonesses, was the unrepachable Sita, like a star fallen, bedecked with virtue and devotion to her Lord. Looking at her who lay there like a neglected lyre, Hanuman wept and bowed to Rama.

Then singing softly of Rama, he attracted Sita's attention and disclosed himself as Rama's messenger. He explained that Rama's delay in coming was due to his failure to know her place of imprisonment and went on to reassure Sita, "Owing to your separation, Rama does not taste good food; he does not even brush aside flies, mosquitos, or insects sitting on his body, so absorbed is his mind in thinking of you. He is always in deep thought and poignant sorrow, he has no sleep and if he dozes, he rises up suddenly uttering your sweet name. If he comes across any flower or fruit, anything exceedingly charming, he sighs, "Ah my beloved!" and begins to address you."

Hanuman could have carried Sita on his back, but she refused because it would greatly detract from Rama's glory and honor if Rama did not rescue her himself, and besides, she could not, of herself, touch the body of another than her husband. So it was agreed that Hanuman would hurry to Rama and bring him back to release Sita at once, since at the end of two months Ravana would have his cooks dress her for his breakfast. Hanuman gave Sita Rama's signet ring and took for him her crest jewel.

Before leaving, however, Hanuman decided to show the demons something of the force they would have to contend with, so he destroyed all the grove of trees except the one under which Sita sat, and when the demons came against him he took his full stature, lashed his tail, roared, plucked an iron

rod from the arched gateway and killed them all. Then, after killing several of Ravana's chieftains, he let himself be captured so he could meet and warn Ravana, and when the captors tied his tail with cotton rags, poured oil on it and set it afire, he broke away and roamed over the city setting fire to all the buildings. Then he quenched the fire on his tail in the ocean and hurried back to tell Rama of the austerity and safety of the faithful Sita.

Rama was immensely pleased and embraced Hanuman. Then, because it was just noon, the sun was at meridian, and it was an auspicious moment which would bring victory, they set out at once toward the south. When they came to the seashore, they stopped to make their plans for crossing the sea to Lanka. As they rested there, the thought of Sita disturbed Rama intensely. He said, addressing the breeze flowing from across the water, "Blow from where my beloved is; having touched her, touch me also, and through you, let me have her touch."

In the meantime, at Lanka, Ravana called his counselors and asked for their advice as to the best way to overcome Rama. Vibhishana, his younger brother, opposed a war, saying, "This violation of another's woman is infamous, detrimental to one's longevity, root of terrible loss and sinful; before Rama tears Lanka to pieces, let Sita be returned to him O King, give up wrath which is the enemy of virtue and happiness. Seek righteousness whereby happiness and fame will increase; please, I beseech you, let Sita be returned to him." And when Ravana reviled him, he went on, "Those whose time is up do not take wholesome advice. Easy is it to have men who always talk what is pleasing; hard is it to have one who can speak forth what is unpleasant but is wholesome." Then Vibhishana left Lanka and flew over to where Rama was and said to the monkeys who intercepted him: "Announce me quickly to that great soul Rama, the refuge of the whole world." Hearing of Vibhishana's arrival, Rama said, "I afford security to him who surrenders but once, and beseeches with the words, 'I am yours.' This is my vow. Bring him, Chief of Monkeys, I have given security. Let him be Vibhishana, let him be Ravana himself."

They then thought of the way to cross to Lanka, and after Rama had spent three days in austerities and threatened to hurl the divine missile Brahma-astra at the sea, the Lord of the seas came up and suggested that they should build a causeway, and offered to sustain the causeway. The monkey army brought huge trees and rocks and threw them into the sea; Hanuman flung hill after hill to be placed in the water, until the causeway extended over two hundred and fifty miles and the sea looked like hair parted in the middle.

Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman, and all their hosts of monkey warriors then crossed over to Lanka, and the terrible battle with the armies of Ravana was fought. The losses were great on both sides, but one by one the great warriors who fought for Ravana were destroyed. At one point Indrajit, Ravana's son, making himself invisible through his magic powers, rained such a storm of arrows that Rama and Lakshmana lay sorely wounded on the battlefield, and hundreds of their monkey warriors were wounded or killed. To revive them Hanuman was sent flying to the Himalayas to the mountain of herbs to get the four luminous herbs: the rejuvenator, the remover of broken particles of arms inside one's body, the restorer of complexion, and the joiner of broken limbs. The very smell of the herbs rid all the warriors of their wounds and the dead rose as if from sleep.

There followed a fierce battle in which Lakshmana killed Indrajit, and the terrible fight in which Rama destroyed Ravana. After using all his other weapons, finally Rama took the dread Brahma-astra, the missile which originally Brahma himself devised and gave to Indra, which was constituted of the energy of all beings. He uttered the Vedic mantra for its use and laid it on his bow string. The entire living world shuddered; quaked, and like inexorable Fate the Brahma-astra fell on Ravana's heart and came back to Rama's quiver. Deprived of life, Ravana's body fell from the chariot with terrible force.

Over his body the beautiful favorite Queen Mandodari lamented, "You lie here, thus, you who gave ache to all the three worlds, vanquished the guardians of the world, shook Siva himself and made all living cry in fear and pain. The saying is true that the tears of a chaste woman do not fall in vain; the curses of those violated by you have come true. When a warrior like you stooped to the cowardly act of stealing Sita, it was clear that your misfortune had begun to fructify. Mad with your strength you never listened to those who spoke truth, and now has come this destruction of the demons as a result of ceaseless addiction to lust and passion."

The battle over, Rama sent Hanuman to tell Sita of their victory and to return with her message. When Hanuman returned with the word that Sita desired to see him, Rama immediately plunged into thought, tears brimmed in his eyes, and with deep and hot breath he asked Vibhishana to dress Sita well before bringing her to him. Dejection and indignation disturbed his joy; ominous indications of indifference to his wife were perceptible in Rama, and Lakshmana and Hanuman gathered that Rama was dissatisfied with Sita. For her part, as if melting into herself in shame, Sita approached Rama, just addressed him as "Lord," then shrouded her face in her garment and wept. The sight of her only increased Rama's fury and he spoke to

her very cruel words. "Know Sita, the effort of war was not taken by me on your behalf, but to clear my name and that of my family of disrepute; I am not able to stand your sight even as a man of sore eyes cannot stand a light. Therefore go, with my leave, anywhere. I have no need of you, for what man of honor and high breeding will take back a woman who has lived in another's house?"

Sita shrank within herself in shame, wept and spoke in broken tones. "I am not what you take me to be; believe me, I swear by my character. If Ravana's body had touched me when he carried me off, I am not to blame. What is in my control, that my heart, is wholly in you. Yielding to anger alone you behave like a man of the street." Then she ordered Lakshmana to prepare a pyre, and when it was ready Sita went around Rama who was standing with a downcast face and approached the burning fire. Bowing to the gods, Sita addressed the Fire. "If my heart has not swerved from Rama, let Fire, witness of the world, protect me; if by act, thought, and word, I have not been unfaithful to Rama, let Fire, witness of the world, protect me: if Sun, Wind, the Quarters, Moon, the Day, the two twilights, the Night, Earth, and others know me as one of character, let Fire protect me." With these words Sita entered the fire.

Immediately, the Fire god rose up bearing Sita and gave her to Rama with the words, "There is no sin in Sita; she has not been faithless to you by word, thought, or sight. Accept her. Do not speak a word. I command you." Rama thought for a while and replied, "True Sita is stainless but if I take her without purification, the good ones may remark that, young and passionate, Rama simply took his wife who had been taken and kept by Ravana for a long time in his place. I too know her chastity and singlehearted devotion to me, but I allowed her to enter fire so that the world at large may believe in her chastity."

Then, their time of exile being completed, Rama and Sita returned to Ayodhya where Bharata, living in a hermitage, continued as regent. They were received with great joy. Rama was crowned King, and there he reigned long, performing many sacrifices.

In Rama's reign (Ramarajya) there was no wailing of widowed women, no fear of disease, theft, or other calamities; elders did not have to perform the obsequies of the younger ones; everyone was righteous, and thinking always of Rama, refrained from injuring another; rains fell in proper times, vegetation put forth its fruits in season and out of season; and everyone was satisfied with his duties, the classes were contented and free from avarice.





Siva--One of the Three Chief Hindu Deities

Siva is the god of destruction or absorption in the concept of the Hindu Triad made up of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. He, however, not only destroys, but also creates, sustains, obscures by his power of illusion (maya), and offers grace to the suffering world. These are his fivefold activities, according to a devout Hindu. Siva was known as the father-god, the lord of animals, and the great ascetic from very ancient, Pre-Vedic times. Later developments show him in his terrifying and his gracious aspect; many myths and shrines have grown up around these two aspects of his character.

Phallic emblems and the figure of a deity seated in a peculiar yogic posture surrounded by a man and several animals, found in the Indus valley archeological excavations, indicate that the concept of a father-god who was at the same time a lord of animals and a great ascetic was well established in Pre-Vedic times. It is probable, if not certain, that the principal deity of the Shiva cult is the result of the amalgamation of such Pre-Vedic god-concepts with Rudra of the Rigveda, who has his terrifying and gracious aspects--and with other god-concepts of later times. However, "Shiva" as his proper name was somewhat late in making its appearance in literature; the word was first used in the sense of "auspicious," but from the time that it was used as the proper name of the god it was the favorite.

The first tangible references to the exclusive worshippers of Shiva are found in grammatical texts of the fifth century B.C. About eighteen hundred years ago Lakulisa seems to have organized the cult of Siva devotees which became known by his name. Lauklisa was deified by posterity and he occupies an honored place in the Saiva pantheon. Some of his immediate disciples also seem to have founded other subsects allied to the system, which were of an extreme type. Some of their religious rites and practices were of an unsocial character and not generally approved by other members of the Hindu society.

There grew up popular as well as highly philosophical systems devoted to Shiva, both of which contained some of the highest and purest ideas about god. Unsophisticated villagers look upon him as their familiar friend, the father of a family consisting of his wife Durga and his two sons Kartikeya and Ganesa (his favorite son), and his two daughters, Lakshmi, the Goddess of fortune, and Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Durga is the daughter of the personified Himalaya mountain. At their annual festival on the concluding

day of the year, many villagers work out this homely idea about their lovable companion god who looks after their well-being and is easily pleased with their festive rites and ceremonies. Side by side with this popular aspect of the god can be placed the highly philosophical ideas current about him in the monistic, dualistic, and pluralistic schools of Saivism. The Pratyabhijna system of the Kashmir school of Saivism, for instance, idealizes him in the highest and most abstruse manner.

The great god has been represented by many different images, animal, anthropomorphic, and phallic. The sacred bull is the god in his animal form, transformed by the Saiva devotees centuries ago into his vehicle, to accompany the deity represented in human or phallic form. In every Shiva temple may be seen an image of this sacred bull, called Nandi, placed on a high pedestal facing the shrine, its eyes riveted on the emblem of the god in the main sanctum.

There are numerous human images of Shiva, showing him in his terrifying and gracious aspects, most of them illustrating the innumerable tales that are told about him. Shiva is said to have destroyed various demons, such as the Elephant-Demon and others. He also punished such gods as Brahma for telling lies, and Yama, the god of death, for his audacity in attempting to take away the life of one of the devotees of Shiva. Kama, the god of love, was punished for daring to hit him with his flowery arrows in order that his meditation, into which he had entered after the tragic death of his first wife Sati, might be disturbed and he would have feelings of love for Uma (Parvati, the daughter of the Himalaya), whom he afterward married).

Shiva is also said to have conferred grace on gods, men, and even demons on various occasions; thus at one time he was pleased with the great devotion of Vishnu and presented him with the wheel or discus (chakra), one of the principle attributes of Vishnu. While in exile, Arjuna, hero of the Mahabharata epic, practiced severe penance to please Shiva and get some invincible weapons from him, and Shiva, after testing his strength, gave him the great weapon which stood the Pandava brothers in good stead in the war with the Kauravas. Ravana, the demon king of Lanka in the Ramayana epic, was a great devotee of Shiva and once attempted to uplift bodily Shiva's favorite section of the Himalaya mountain and take it, along with Shiva and Parvati, to Lanka to establish him there. Shiva at first punished his devotee for his audacity, but later, satisfied with his extreme devotion, favored him by agreeing to accompany him to his country. The rock-cut temple at Ellora illustrates the story of Ravana's punishment. The divine river Ganges condescended to come down to earth after

being assured that Shiva, the great God of the Himalaya mountains, had been pleased, as a result of a devotee's penance, to bear the forceful impact of the falling torrents of the river on the matted locks of his head.

The forms of Shiva which do not portray any particular mythology are also numerous. In his gracious character he is shown sometimes as the loving husband of Uma (also called Durga) and the father of a family. Others show him as master of various arts, learning, and yogic attainments. Thus he is a great dancer, the king among dancers, Nataraja, who dances in the sheer playful joy of creation, and the forms which the Indian artists give to this aspect of the god are some of the most beautiful and sublime creations in the world of art. One of the holiest Shiva shrines of southern India is that at Chidambaram, said by its devotees to be the center of the universe, and there the principal object of worship is Shiva as Nataraja, the Dancing Shiva. As a great performer of instrumental music he is shown as playing on a lute; again, he is depicted as the greatest expounder of the scriptures; as the great mediator, he is presented to his devotees in his yoga state.

It is a fact, however, that the anthropomorphic forms of Shiva are not usually the principal objects of worship in Shiva shrines. They are indeed highly venerated, and many such anthropomorphic images are to be found in the Saiva temples, but the main sanctum there almost invariably contains the supreme emblem of the father-god, the Shiva linga. That is the chief object of veneration, and it is necessary to say something about its original character, antiquity, and gradual acceptance as the noblest symbol of his god by a Saiva and by Hindus in general.

The main idea underlying the Shiva linga in its most primitive aspect was undoubtedly phallic. The linga seems to have been one of the cult objects of the ancient people, and it is presumable that the Vedic Aryans did not approve of it. The Vedic sages revile in no uncertain terms those who worship a phallic emblem, and invoke their chief god Indra to destroy them. It is also true that no clear reference to the worship of the phallic emblem as forming a part of the ritualistic religion of the early Indo-Aryans is found in the older sections of their literature, nor is there any clear reference in the earlier post-Vedic literature. The first explicit mention of it is found in the Mahabharata, showing that it was already well established in the Hindu fold by the first or second century A.D.

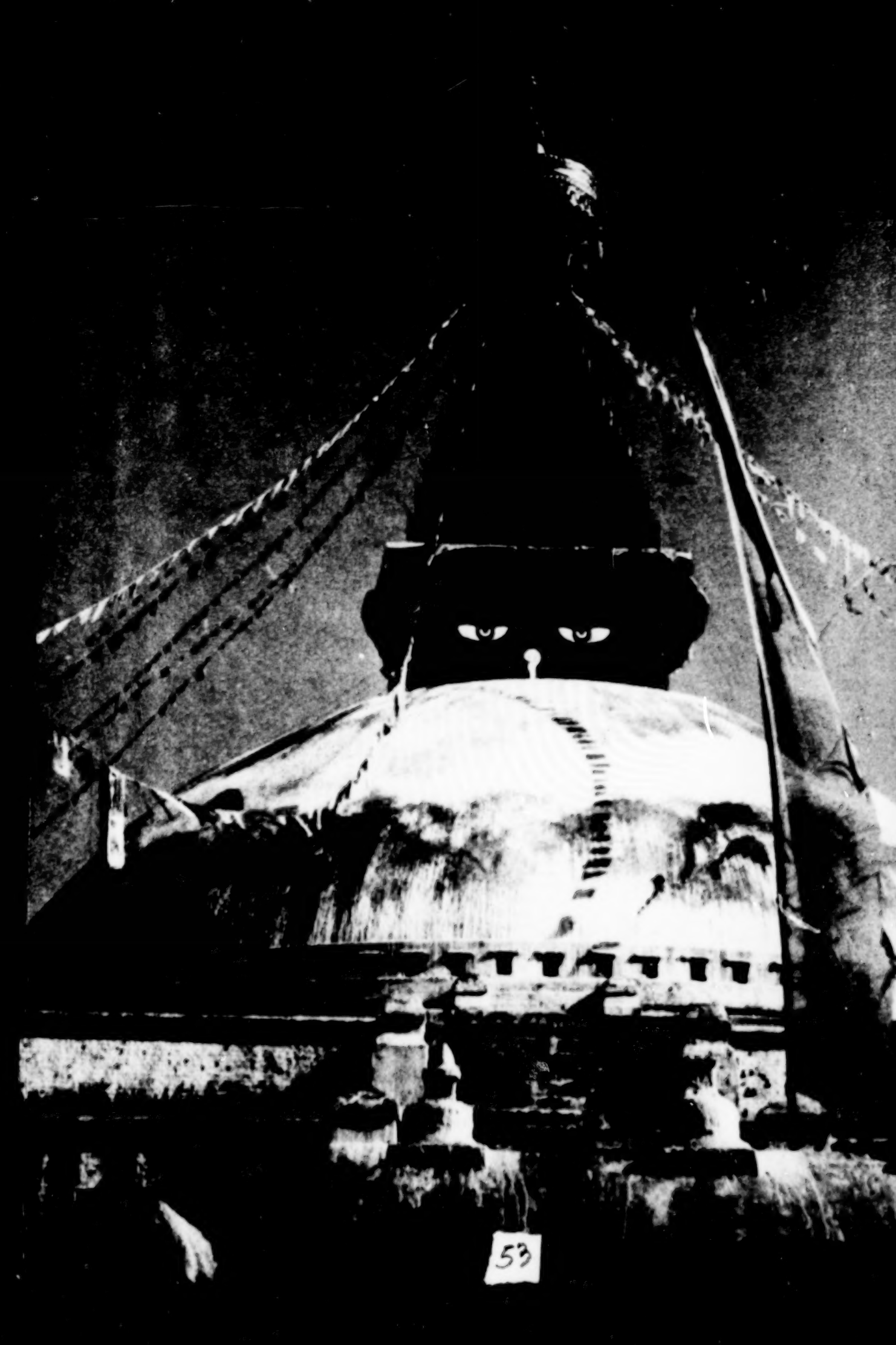
The reason for this early non-acceptance of the emblem by the orthodox section of the Hindus can be traced without

doubt to the very realistic representation of the male generative organ in earlier times. The ancient idea about it as a symbol of the virile father-god was too strong among the people to be brushed aside and ignored, however, and the intellectuals among them made a compromise. They accepted the emblem as the holiest symbol of Shiva, but conventionalized it in such a way that its original realism was thoroughly lost. This transformation began in the Gupta period, the age of cultural renaissance in ancient India. So great was the change in the manner of its representation that some scholars thought that it originated from the Buddhist votive stupas or reliquary mounds.

It also should not be supposed that in its early phase it symbolized in any way the union of male and female. Even in its conventionalized shape, though its base and horizontal projecting piece are sometimes regarded as representing the female principle, those features of the emblem really serve the very useful purpose of putting it firmly in position and draining off to some distance from its base the water profusely poured on its top.

The conventionalized emblems are of different sizes and their shapes sometimes vary; in general they resemble a short post, rounded at the top. Great sanctity is attached to all of them. Purest and most easily procurable things, fresh flowers, pure water, young sprouts of grass, fruit, leaves, and sun-dried rice are ordinarily used in the ritual part of their worship.







THE BUDDHA

In the 6th century B.C., on the South side of the Siwaliks, in what is now the Lumbini Zone of Nepal, the Republic of the Sakyas had its capitol at Kapilavastu, now identified by the Department of Archaeology of Nepal with an important archaeological site a short distance north of the district capitol of Taulihawa. The Sakya Republic was ruled by a general assembly, had no standing army, and chose their kings from among the Kshatriya or warrior caste to serve in rotation. Suddhadana was of the Kshatriya caste and was perhaps serving as king in C.A. 550 B.C. when his queen Mahamaya had a dream in which a white elephant entered her side. In the morning she went to the garden north of the capitol to consult with the court astrologer. He predicted that she would give birth to a son who would become either a universal monarch or renounce worldly life and become a great spiritual teacher. A large low stupa has been excavated on the north side of Kapilavastu and is believed to mark the site of the prediction. In the late spring, Queen Mahamaya set out on a journey to her father's house to give birth to her son as remains the custom of the Hindus of the Terai to the present day.

In late spring the Terai is extremely inhospitable to travelers. By mid-day, temperatures may rise to above 120 degrees Fahrenheit with dust carried by fierce winds obscuring the sun and clogging the roads. Mahamaya stopped to take rest in a grove of Sala trees sacred to the mother goddess Lumbini. There she gave birth to the Buddha from her side, bathed in the pool there, and died a few days later. Villagers have continued to worship the mother earth goddess at Lumbini as Rummindei, one of the names given to the mother of the Buddha in early Buddhist texts. The Buddha was unknown to local villagers when an archaeologist working for the British Archaeological Survey of India discovered an Asoka pillar at Rummindei in 1896. It is inscribed upon the pillar, "Here Buddha Sakyamuni was born," and details the visit to the site of the Mauryan Emperor Asoka in 273 B.C.

The Buddha returned to Kapilavastu where he was given the name, Gotama. His father fearing the prediction that his son might choose to renounce worldly life and become a great religious teacher, confined Gotama to the palace grounds. Here he

was provided with every pleasure and kept from all knowledge of sickness and death. Gotama was educated in all of the arts and skills of a prince of the warrior caste and married a Sakyan known as Kaccana and Vasadhara. When he was 29 he had a son, Rahula, and shortly thereafter set forth from the palace to discover the nature of the world. It is written that in a series of trips from the palace he saw for the first time a man crippled with age, a helpless sick man, mourners carrying a body to the river to be cremated, and a monk who had renounced all of the pleasures of the world and was unmoved by either pleasure or pain.

The desire of the Buddha to leave the palace in search of a life of serenity, free of the passions of the world of the five senses, became known to King Suddhadana and guards were posted to prevent his departure. On the night of the Great Departure, the Gods cast the guards into a deep sleep and opened the doors of the city through which the Buddha passed riding on his horse Kanthaka and accompanied by his faithful servant Chhandaka. A short distance from Kapilavastu the Buddha gave the reins of his horse to Chhandaka and set out on foot for the forest to meditate.

Deeply troubled by the contrast between the world that he had known and the realities of the world beyond the palace, the Buddha cut his hair, and wearing only the robe of an ascetic, resolved not to return until he had discovered the causes of human suffering. Starting out as a wanderer begging for food, he became a hermit in the forest where he studied the Upanishads and the techniques of meditation from the sage Alara Kalama. Finding self discipline and knowledge to be insufficient for attaining enlightenment, the Buddha joined five other disciples in the practice of extreme self-mortification which he practiced for five years until he became so weak that he was on the point of death.

Leaving his five disciples, the Buddha went and sat under a large pipal tree near Gaya. Sujata, the daughter of a local farmer, brought him a bowl of rice cooked with milk. After eating and bathing, he resolved to remain under the tree in meditation until he achieved enlightenment. For forty days he sat in deep meditation. According to Buddhist mythology, Mara, demon of all earthly pleasure, came and tempted him. Mara sent his three daughters, Desire, Pleasure, and Passion to tempt the Buddha. When they failed, he sent a great storm, attacking the Buddha with wind, rain, and earthquake. but the Buddha was unmoved. Finally Mara offered the Buddha the Universe but the Buddha refused and went deeper into his meditation. Finally after forty days enlightenment came and the Buddha touched the earth to call the earth goddess to witness his triumph over Mara and his knowledge of the cause of human suffering and the path by which mankind could find liberation.

For seven weeks the Buddha remained under the Bodhi tree and meditated upon the great truths that he had discovered. He then went to the deer park at Sarnath on the outskirts of Varanasi and taught his first sermon. Here the Buddha revealed the four Noble Truths: existence in any form involves suffering or sorrow; the cause of suffering is desire and lust for life; the cessation of suffering is effected by the complete conquest over and destruction of desire and lust for life; and that the path leading to the cessation of suffering is the Noble Eight Fold Path. The Eight Fold Path consists of: right belief; right aims; right speech; right actions; right means of livelihood; right endeavor; right mindfulness; and right meditation. The Buddha taught that birth, age, sickness, and death are sorrow and likewise attachment to the five senses; that desire results from clinging to the world of the five senses making rebirth inevitable; and that the extinction of desire is necessary for the attainment of enlightenment. This sermon would later be symbolized in Buddhist art as a wheel, usually with eight spokes, and the teaching of the eight fold path would be referred to as the turning of the wheel of the law. The Buddha spent forty-five years traveling throughout the Gangetic plain teaching, making converts, establishing orders for both monks and nuns, and engaging in debates with the great Brahmin teachers and sages of his day. He returned to Kapilavastu where he converted his family and the Sakya clan to Buddhism. In his eightieth year he died in a grove of Sala trees as Kusinagara near present-day Gorakpur in the year 283 B.C.

No known likeness of the Buddha has come down to us that was made during his lifetime and it is unlikely that any was made as for several centuries after the death of Buddha he was represented in art by symbols representing the different incidents in his life and the doctrine that he taught. We are indebted to his young disciple Ananda for his recitation from memory of the discourses of Buddha. Because the Buddha's discourses were handed down for many generations orally before being written down, we will never be certain how much of what has been written has come from the Buddha and how much is the amplification of his teaching by the many brilliant disciples who followed him. What is certain is that a body of not only religious teaching but social doctrines emerged which made Buddhism extremely popular among the disadvantaged and lower castes. D. D. Kosambi in his book, Ancient India, summarizes some of the teachings of the Buddha which explain why Buddhism became a force for change that went beyond India to influence the social evolution of social and political institutions in southeast Asia, China, Korea, and Japan. Kosambi writes on the Buddhist social doctrine as follows:

Buddhist scriptures work out the duties of a householder and peasant regardless of caste, wealth,

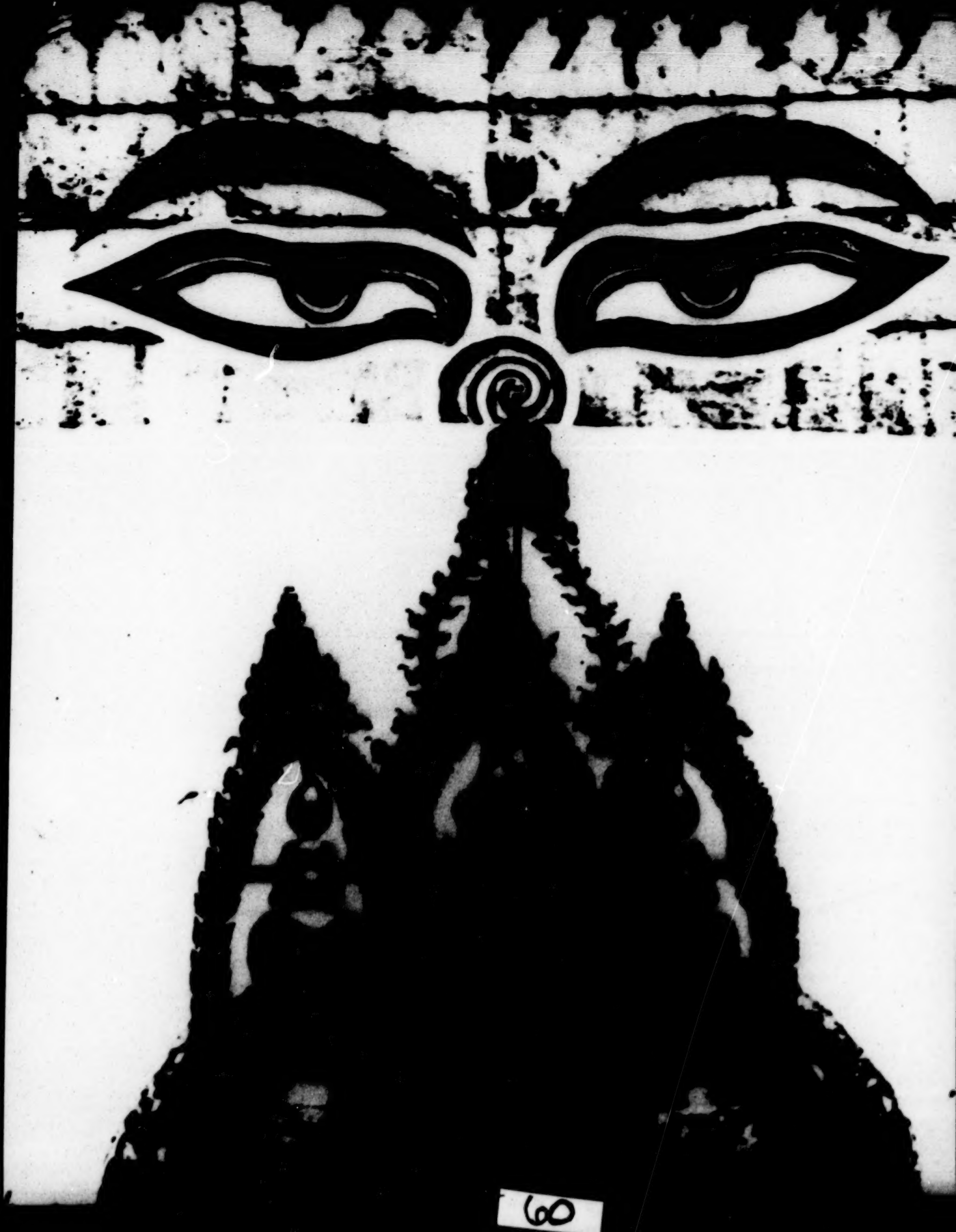
profession--and with no attention whatever to ritual. They argue against brahmin pretensions and specialized ritual with consummate skill but in the simplest words. Caste might exist as a social distinction; it had no permanence, no inner justification. Nor did ritual, which was irrelevant and unnecessary for the good life. The canonical writings, almost all supposedly from the Buddha's discourses and dialogues, were in everyday language and plain style without mysticism or lengthy speculation. This was a new type of religious literature addressed to the whole of contemporary society, not reserved for a few learned initiates and adepts. Most important of all, the Buddha or some anonymous early disciple ventured to propound new duties for the absolute monarch: the king who merely collected taxes from a land troubled by brigands and anti-social elements was not doing his duty. Banditry and strife could never be suppressed by force and draconic punishment. The root of social evil was poverty and unemployment. This was not to be bribed away by charity and donations, which would only reward and stimulate evil action. The correct way was to supply seed and food to those who lived by agriculture and cattle-breeding. Those who lived by trade should be furnished with the necessary capital. Servants of the state should be paid properly and regularly so that they would not find ways to squeeze the common people. New wealth would thus be generated, and the people liberated from robbers and cheats. A citizen could bring up his children in comfort and happiness, free from want and fear, in such a productive and contented environment. The best way of spending surplus accumulation, whether in the treasury or from voluntary private donations, would be in public works such as digging wells and water ponds and planting groves along the trade routes.

This amazingly contemporary social doctrine was a reaction to the rigid and highly ritualized Hinduism of Buddha's day and the power of the kings and brahmins to control the social, political, economic, and religious life of the people for their own benefit. Despite its impact on other cultures of Asia, Buddhism was unable to permanently alter the social life of Hindu India. The monastic centers of Saranath, Nalanda, and Bodi Gaya became great centers of learning which brought Buddhist pilgrims from as far away as China to study, but the monastic nature of the Buddhist order and its vows of poverty, chastity, and a life devoted to a search for spiritual salvation, separated it from the life of village India. In striving with Hinduisim for the allegiance of the people, it gradually began to absorb the local beliefs of its adherents even as Vedic Hinduism was radically changed by indigenous beliefs in mother and earth goddesses,

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spirits, demons, nagas, and all of the rituals associated with their worship and appeasement. When the Muslim invasions of the 8th to 11th centuries destroyed the great Buddhist centers of learning, Buddhism as an organized religion ceased to exist in India but continued to flourish in the mountains to the north, Ceylon to the south, and in Southeast Asia and the Far East. The more conservative Buddhists continued to follow the Pali texts in which the original discourses of the Buddha were written and the nontheistic ideal of purification of the self as the correct path for achieving nirvana. By the 2nd century A.D. this sect became known as the Hinayana or lesser vehicle and the dominant sect, the Mahayana or greater vehicle rose in ascendancy. Assimilating native languages and culture, the Mahayanists developed Buddhism into a theistic religion with a pantheon of deities paralleling Hinduism and absorbing the Hindu gods under their old or different names but with new meanings and relationships. Though this split into two schools took place as early as the 2nd century A.D., we are informed by the Chinese pilgrim, Yuan Chwang, that in the 7th century both Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism as well as Brahmanical Hinduism, were being practiced in Nepal.





BUDDHISM IN NEPAL

Though the assertion of the Swayambupuran that the Buddha himself visited the Kathmandu Valley and converted many to Buddhism cannot be corroborated by other Buddhist texts or archaeological evidence, there is no evidence to contradict this possibility. Likewise, the assertion that Asoka gave his daughter in marriage to the Kshatriya Devapala and that she built the vihara or monastery in Deo Patan known to this day as Chabahal (Charumati Vihara), is not likely to be proven or discredited at any time in the near future for the stupas in Patan in the earliest Asoka style and other major shrines as Swayambunath remain objects of deep held veneration on the part of the Newars, Tamangs, Sherpas, and other Buddhists in the rest of Nepal, and are thus off limits to excavation. What is certain is that the great number of very early sculptures and stupas in the Kathmandu Valley indicate that Buddhism came to Nepal very early and that it had a major and lasting impact on the culture of the Newars which has remained a major social and cultural force in Nepal to the present day. Swayambunath and Pashupatinath, the former dedicated to Adi Buddha and the latter to Siva are among the earliest and most sacred shrines in Nepal. They are centers of pilgrimage for Buddhists and Hindus alike from India and beyond.

The cult of Siva and the evolution of Mahayana Buddhism are closely linked to one another through the development of Tantric forms of worship which are first mentioned in the Gangdhar inscription in A.D. 423 but which is an oral tradition which may in fact predate both Vedic Hinduism and Buddhism as it is concerned with Sakti or mother goddess worship as evidenced by sculptures predating the Aryan invasions of 1500 B.C. Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and Nirvana, all took place in groves associated with mother goddesses. According to Tibetan Buddhist texts, the Buddha touched the earth upon his enlightenment to call forth the earth goddess to witness his triumph over Mara. In the cult of Siva, Parvati (goddess of the mountains) is Siva's consort and in the form of Durga is more powerful than all of the Gods. As Kali she even danced in such frenzy that the universe was in imminent danger of destruction and could only be stopped by Siva falling under her feet. In Tantric Hinduism, the mother goddess came to symbolize energy

or power, whereas in Mahayana Buddhism she became Prajnaparamita, consort of Buddha, Vairocana, and Buddha Akhsobya, and symbolized knowledge or the perfection of wisdom. Shiva in his terrific form as Bhairava was worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists alike. Central to Tantric forms of both was the use of Mandalas or ritual diagrams for concentration and meditation, sacrifices of animals and even human beings, and the use of mantras or sacred syllables for summoning forth sources of spiritual energy in the body for controlling evil spirits and demons.

By as early as the 6th century A.D. the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley had evolved a highly syncretistic system of beliefs that combined Shivaism, Vishnuism, Mahayana Buddhism, and worship of mother goddesses with a sharing of the same temples, shrines, rituals and festivals, that has continued to the present day. The Kings of Nepal, whether Hindu or Buddhist, supported both through donations and the building of temples. By the beginning of the Christian era the concept of Bodhisattvas or Buddhas who had chosen to return to earth and to work for the salvation of all mankind had become an important aspect of Mahayana Buddhism. The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, the lord of infinite mercy, became the protective deity of the Kathmandu Valley in the form of Machindranath. He was believed to have been brought to Nepal by king Narendra Deo of Bhadgaon, the priest Bandhudutta, and a Jhapu Lalit, to end a 12-year drought. Though a Buddhist deity, he is worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists alike.

In 640 A.D. Amsuvarman gave his daughter in marriage to Tsrong Song Gampo, the king of Tibet and she is credited with converting the formerly warring king to Buddhism. By the 8th century she became personified as the Buddhist goddess Tara, a savior in Buddhism with a position in the pantheon very similar to that of the Virgin Mary in medieval Catholicism. In 747 the great Buddhist teacher Padmasambhava, or Guru Rimpoche, travelled from India through Nepal to Tibet where, after a great struggle with the followers of Bon Po, he established the first monastic movement in Tibet, and remains an extremely important figure for the Buddhists in Northern Nepal especially among the Tamangs and Sherpas. With the fall of the early Tibetan kingdoms in the 9th century, Buddhism in Tibet was cut off from outside influences and became strongly influenced by indigenous belief systems. Between 981 and 1054, the great Buddhist teacher, Atisa, traveled to Tibet and set about reforming Tibetan Buddhism. This new reformed Buddhism, known as the Gelukpa or yellow hat sect, instituted celibacy for monks and a more strict monastic order for the monasteries. In 1391 the first Dalai Lama became spiritual head of the Gelukpa order and was considered as an incarnation of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. The present Dalai Lama is the 14th.



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The rise of the great monasteries in Tibet in the 14th century had a major influence on people in Nepal living on the northern border areas. Though the Buddhism of the hills of Nepal is a syncretistic interrelationship between shamanistic beliefs in spirits that may cause harm to humans and Buddhist deities who may protect mankind from demons and spirits and is thus more closely related to the tantric tradition of the earlier school of Padmasambhava, the Dalai Lamas have been held in great veneration by the Buddhists of Nepal. The influx of Tibetan refugees since the Chinese take-over of Tibet, has resulted in a revitalization of Buddhism in the northern areas of Nepal with the restoration and building of new Buddhist temples and a revival of traditional Buddhist arts and crafts.

For over 1500 years Buddhism has flourished in Nepal under changing dynasties of Hindu kings. The Mallas were great patrons of the arts and contributed generously to the building of Buddhist temples and monasteries as well as the giving of land for their maintenance. Following the Gurkha conquest and particularly during the period of the Rana prime ministership, monastery lands were confiscated and given to members of the court and other prominent families. Despite opposition from the more conservative Brahmins, King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah Dev inaugurated the 2500 year celebrations of the birth of the Buddha at Lumbini. The influx of not only Buddhists from Tibet following the Chinese takeover, but of foreign scholars and tourists interested in Buddhism, has made the government aware of the importance of Nepal's Buddhist cultural heritage and the government, in cooperation with UNESCO, has been involved in the restoration of Buddhist temples and monasteries. A major project is now underway to develop Lumbini as a major pilgrimage center for Buddhists from all over the world and will include a museum and land set aside for Buddhists from many countries to build temples and resthouses for travelers coming to Lumbini.





END

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